Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Meditation & Its Practices

A Definitive Guide to
Techniques and Traditions
of Meditation in
Yoga and **Vedanta**

Swami Adiswarananda

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Meditation & Its Practices

A Definitive Guide to
Techniques and Traditions of Meditation in
***Yoga* & Vedanta**

Cat No 908
15/11

Swami Adiswarananda
Minister and Spiritual Leader of the
Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York

स्कैन्ड/Scanned

Advaita Ashrama
(Publication Department)
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata 700 014

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

यथा दीपो निवातस्थो नेङ्गते सोपमा स्मृता ॥
योगिनो यतचित्तस्य युञ्जतो योगमात्मनः ॥ १९ ॥

"'As a lamp in a windless place does not flicker'—
that is the figure used for the disciplined mind of a
yogi practicing concentration on the Self."

—BHAGAVAD GITA 6.19

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Contents

Publisher's Note to the Indian Edition vii
Preface ix
Introduction xi

PART ONE THE PROCESS OF MEDITATION

1. The Meaning of Meditation 3
2. The Meditative State 12
3. The Goal of Meditation 19
4. The Benefits of Meditation 27
5. Meditation in the System of Yoga 31
6. Meditation in Vedanta 41
7. The Sacred Texts on Meditation 61
8. The Three Key Factors in All Meditation 69

PART TWO OBJECTS OF MEDITATION

9. Objects of Meditation in Yoga and Vedanta 75
10. Meditation on a Divine Form 78
11. Meditation on a Divine Incarnation 81
12. Meditation on the Lord as Inmost Self and Supreme Teacher 87
13. Meditation on Virata Purusha, the Cosmic Person ... 91
14. Meditation on the Sacred Word Om 95
15. Meditation on the Gayatri Mantra 127
16. Meditation on the Great Vedic Sayings 149
17. Meditation on a Sacred Text, Word, or Mystic Syllable 170

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

PART THREE CENTERS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

18. The Centers for Meditation ... 173
19. Dualism, Nondualism, and the Centers ... 187

PART FOUR METHODS OF CONCENTRATION

20. Withdrawal and Concentration of Mind ... 193
21. Posture ... 196
22. Time and Place, Spiritual Vibrations, and Geographical Directions ... 201
23. Physical Condition, Eating Habits, and Exercise ... 213
24. Self-Analysis ... 228
25. Mystic Worship ... 237
26. Japa, or Repetition of a Sacred Word ... 241
27. Pranayama, or Control of Breath ... 270

PART FIVE PROGRESS IN MEDITATION

28. Milestones of Progress ... 293
29. Mystical Experiences and Realizations ... 328
30. The Transformation of Character ... 347
31. The Sacred Texts on Progress in Meditation ... 401

PART SIX OBSTACLES IN MEDITATION

32. Obstacles in Meditation and Ways of Overcoming Them ... 415

Notes ... 433
Glossary ... 453
Bibliography ... 461
Index ... 466

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Publisher's Note to the Indian Edition

Spiritual seekers all over the world practice meditation in some form or other for the highest spiritual illumination and fulfillment. Others also meditate for peace, serenity and relief from mental worries and tensions. Interest in meditation is thus growing day by day. Many books on the subject have been published in India and abroad. Still, books on meditation based on authoritative orthodox texts and orthodox interpretations are rare. The present volume, *Meditation and Its Practices*, belongs to this category of books and fulfills a need felt by earnest spiritual seekers with a rational bent of mind.

Swami Adiswarananda, its author, the minister and spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, has done painstaking research and guided many individuals in their practice of meditation over the last several decades. The results of his deep study, long contemplation and experience are evident in the pages of this book.

We are indebted to the publisher, SkyLight Paths Publishing, Vermont, USA, for giving us permission to bring out an Indian edition for its circulation confined to the Indian subcontinent.

June, 19th 2004 PUBLISHER
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Preface

Meditation is a subject of universal interest. It is practiced by spiritual seekers of all traditions, in some form or another, for serenity, peace, and blessedness. The time-honored teachings of meditation, as embodied in the systems of Yoga and Vedanta, serve as a source of inspiration to seekers all over the world. Among the many traditions of meditation in Hinduism, the traditions of Yoga and Vedanta are generally regarded as the two mainstream teachings. While both Yoga and Vedanta strive for the same goal, the two systems differ in their approach to that goal. The present book is a study of the subject of meditation and its practices following the methods and teachings of these two systems.

There are four universal principles of Yoga and Vedanta: divinity of the individual soul, unity of existence, oneness of the Ultimate Reality, and harmony of religions. Divinity of the soul is the unshakable spiritual basis of freedom and self-fulfillment. The unity of existence is the foundation of all ethical virtues. Self-love is the mainspring of a man's action and the raison d'être of his love for others. But Yoga and Vedanta remind us that the true self of a person is the self of all beings. While the Ultimate Reality is one, the names, forms, and symbols describing It are various. They are frail attempts of the human mind to name the nameless and to attribute form to that which is formless. Oneness of the Ultimate Reality teaches us to remain loyal to our own ideal, but to show positive respect to the ideals of others. All religions are fundamentally the same. Unity in diversity is the law of life and so it is in matters of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

religion. Different seekers following different paths are all trying to reach the same goal. The methods of meditation in Yoga and Vedanta do not cater to emotionalism or any form of sentimentalism. They are precise, scientific, and psychological. They do not measure success in meditation by the seeker's dreams or visions, which are personal and private, but by transformation of his or her character. Following these methods of meditation, many have attained direct perception of truth and the fulfillment of life. These traditions, methods, and teachings of Yoga and Vedanta have passed the test of time, and they are as alive today as they were in the past.

In support of the presentations in the book, extensive citations have been made from orthodox texts. These texts include *Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali; Upanishads; Bhagavad Gita; Uddhava Gita (The Last Message of Sri Krishna); Vivekachudamani (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination); Aparokshanubhuti (Direct Experience of Reality); The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master; Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works; The Teachings of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi; The Laws of Manu*, and others. Teachings on the subject of meditation that remain scattered over many texts have been brought together in this volume for the convenience of spiritual seekers. The explanations given with the texts are based on the orthodox interpretations of Yoga and Vedanta.

The book is the result of painstaking research of several years. Many have worked hard to make this publication possible. I am deeply grateful to Martin Sulzberg, Barry Zelikovsky, Rob Baker, Priscilla Carden, Lisa Meyer, Mary Jo Krey, and others for reading and editing the manuscript and giving valuable suggestions. I will feel greatly rewarded if the book is of help to spiritual seekers in the practice of meditation.

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA
Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center
New York

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Introduction

Life in this world is not what it appears to be. It is plagued by pairs of opposites, such as pain and pleasure, birth and death, and hope and disappointment. It is subject to six changes: birth, subsistence, growth, maturity, decline, and death. Dangers and difficulties pursue us everywhere. Uncertainties at every step of life create anxiety, fear, and hopelessness. As we grow older our optimism turns into pessimism. Youthful dreams of happiness and fulfillment rarely come true. It is said that a human individual is born crying, lives complaining, and dies disappointed. Asked by a king about the meaning of life, a sage once replied, "A man is born, he suffers, and he dies." More than twenty-five hundred years ago Buddha said that if all the tears that had flowed from human eyes since the beginning of creation were gathered together, they would exceed the waters of the ocean.

Responses to the problem of suffering have been various. Believers in a millennium live with the hope that someday a prophet or an Incarnation of God will be born and usher in a golden age of peace and happiness. There are others who try to cope with the problems of life. Dangers and difficulties, uncertainties and changes, they say, are inevitable and nothing can be done about them; and so we must learn to live with them. Transcendentalists try to withdraw from life and seek solace and serenity on the spiritual plane. So-called pragmatists maintain that this life is the only life we have, and so we must enjoy it to the full. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Progressivists believe that through the advancement of science

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

and technology someday all evils and ills will be eliminated, and then there will be only good. Hardened materialists choose to fight the ills of life solely by material means. People of faith consider life inherently corrupt and sinful and are of the opinion that any attempt to improve it is futile. They bear with life and practice virtues, hoping for compensation hereafter. But none of the above solutions really helps us to face and overcome the problems of life.

The hopes of the believers in a golden age end in disappointment. The golden age never comes. Coping with the problems of life is easier said than done. There is a limit to coping, and beyond that limit life becomes unbearable. The transcendentalists want to escape the problems of life by withdrawing into silence and solitude. But we must not forget that the world follows us wherever we go. The so-called pragmatists also become disappointed because enjoyments only temporarily excite the senses, and such excitement is followed by sorrow. Progressivists believe in progress toward good and hope to eliminate evil altogether. But as we make progress toward good, evil also increases in the same proportion; we cannot increase the one without increasing the other. The efforts of the materialists to overcome the problems of life through material means are never successful. All the ills of life are not physical. Material solutions are useless against old age, fear, anxiety, and death. For the people of faith, the rewards of the hereafter, whatever they may be, cannot take away the suffering of life here on earth. There can be no heavenly solutions to our earthly problems.

Yoga and Vedanta ask us to face the problems of life through Knowledge of Reality. The ills of life are not created by God, or by the stars, or by luck, but by our own inability to live in the light of Reality. Good and evil move together; one cannot be separated from the other. There is no absolute definition of good or evil. What is good for one person may be bad for another. The world we live in is in our own mind.

The Vedic seers tell us that the causes of suffering are five, and they are: ignorance that makes us out of touch with Ultimate Reality; ego that creates the world of dreams and desires; attachment to things and beings of that dream world; aversion toward things and beings we do not like; and clinging to life and not moving forward. Reality, according to these seers, has two faces: Ulti-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

mate or Absolute Reality that is real for all time and is unchanging, and relative reality that is real for two years, two hundred years, or two thousand years. Relative reality, when separated from the Absolute, becomes destructive, and the relative world becomes fraught with pain, sorrow, and suffering. The Absolute Reality is the reality of one all-pervading Self dwelling as the inmost Self of all beings, as the witness consciousness of the changing phenomena of life. The universe is the dynamic manifestation of the Absolute Reality within the bounds of time, space, and causation. All existence is one. Each individual is like a leaf on a tree. Leaves come and go, but the tree continues to exist. This Absolute Reality is our true identity, the Consciousness of all consciousness, the Truth of all truths. Forgetfulness of this Reality creates spiritual blindness and eventually spiritual bankruptcy, the root cause of all the sufferings and maladies of life. Physical and mental sufferings are only the symptoms of this deep-rooted spiritual malady.

The only way to overcome the maladies of life is to establish contact with the Ultimate Reality, and the only way to make contact with It is through meditation. Meditation leads to direct perception of the Ultimate. Vedanta maintains that direct perception of the Ultimate Reality is the soul of spiritual quest. This perception is more than unquestioning faith, intellectual understanding, or emotional thrill. Unquestioning faith lacks the support of either reason or experience, and so cannot silence doubt. Intellectual understanding based solely on reason cannot withstand the stresses of unpredictable circumstances. Emotion supplies the spiritual seeker with feeling or passion but can make him wander into dark alleys or up dead ends. To protect the seeker from possible self-deception, Vedanta lays down three criteria of Truth: testimony of scripture that serves as a working hypothesis; positive reasoning that seeks to separate the truly essential from the nonessential; and personal experience. All three must point to the same conclusion in order to establish the validity of the seeker's realization of Truth.

In order to free the mind from the pitfalls of unquestioning faith, rationalization, and emotionalism, rigorous disciplines of self-mastery are prescribed so that the seeker may be well grounded in his sincerity of purpose, commitment to the goal, and absolute detachment from blind loyalty to his pet concepts, fanciful ideas, and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

various mental fixations. Direct perception is called *darshana*, meaning "to see." Both reason and faith play vital roles in this regard. One is incomplete without the other. The ultimate realization of Truth may be intuitive, but the validity of such realization must be judged by reason. Faith insists on acceptance; reason asks for scrutiny. If each is followed sincerely, faith and reason join at the moment of final realization. Faith without reason tends to be dictatorial, while reason when not inspired by faith degenerates into endless intellectual speculation. Religious emotion becomes cheap sentimentalism if not strengthened by the scrutiny of reason.

Vedanta gives four tests of direct perception of Reality that harmonize faith and reason. First, direct perception is never negated or superseded by any subsequent experience. Second, it does not contradict reason. Third, it is always conducive to the welfare of all beings. Fourth, it transforms the seeker forever. His moments of mystical intuition, his ecstasies and trances, dreams and visions, cannot be taken as meaningful until they permanently transform his personality. The sure mark of his transformation is his self-expansion that embraces all beings and things of the universe.

A person of such transforming direct perception is called a free soul. Such a person is free because he has risen above all ideas of convention and tradition, culture and race, attachment and aversion. He sees his Self in all and all in his Self. His selfless love for all beings knows no bounds. An embodiment of Universal Truth, he becomes a moving temple of Universal Truth. Only such a free soul can demonstrate the validity of the scriptures and the reality of God—not the dogmatist with his blind belief, the philosopher with his analytic reason, or the theologian with his creedal assertions.

Self-Knowledge through direct perception comes only through meditation. The step leading to meditation is uninterrupted spiritual concentration of mind on the Self. Such concentration does not develop by itself. It has to be practiced consciously and regularly, and requires overcoming the drags of perverted habits, attachments, and desires. For this reason, meditation is a twofold practice. It is focusing the mind on the ideal, while at the same time practicing self-control. It is seeing the all-pervading Self with eyes closed, and also seeing the presence of the same Self in all beings and things with eyes open. In meditation our mind rises higher and higher, and as

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

we gain higher and higher spiritual altitude this world of diversity becomes for us more and more unified, integrated, and divine.

The systems of Yoga and Vedanta present to us, in clear terms, the meaning of meditation, its goal of Self-Knowledge, the methods by which concentration is developed, and the ways of achieving self-control. The goal of meditation is *samadhi,* the state of blissful superconsciousness, known as ultimate Self-Knowledge. Self-Knowledge gives us the highest self-fulfillment, puts an end forever to the sorrows and sufferings of life, and silences all doubts of the mind. Through Self-Knowledge the individual consciousness finds connection with the limitless expanse of Pure Consciousness.

A knower of the Self lives in his body as long as the momentum of past action that produced it endures. Sankaracharya in his *Vivekachudamani (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination)* describes a knower of Self: "Sometimes a fool, sometimes a sage, sometimes possessed of regal splendour; sometimes wandering, sometimes behaving like a motionless python, which waits for its food to come to it; sometimes wearing a benign expression, sometimes honoured, sometimes insulted, sometimes unknown—thus lives the man of realization, ever happy in the Knowledge of Brahman." His passing away is unlike the death of others. He gives up his body as a person gives up his old, worn-out clothes. At death, his soul does not go out to be reincarnated again but is absorbed once and for all in the blissful realm of Absolute Brahman, leaving behind no trace of his separative existence.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Part One

The Process of Meditation

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

1. The Meaning of Meditation

Earth meditates, as it were. The mid-region meditates, as it were. Heaven meditates, as it were. The waters meditate, as it were. The mountains meditate, as it were. The gods meditate, as it were. Men meditate, as it were. Therefore he who, among men, attains greatness here on earth seems to have obtained a share of meditation. Thus while small people are quarrelsome, abusive, and slandering, great men appear to have obtained a share of meditation.
Meditate on meditation.
—*CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD*[1]

Meditation is generally understood as deep concentration on any object. In a sense, everyone meditates, because concentration is indispensable not only for survival but also for success in any walk of life. It is through the power of concentration that we can do, see, hear, or understand anything. Whether we are scientists or artists, office workers or laborers, corporate presidents or parents, we must have concentration of mind in order to accomplish our goals. An archer must concentrate on the target; a fisherman on the bobber; a speaker on the central theme of the talk; a musician on the keynote; and a dancer on the movements of the dance.

Concentration is the way to gain knowledge of any subject. Through concentration the mind acquires the quality of a lens and can penetrate deeply into any object, external or internal, and perceive its real nature. Concentration is the sole method for learning the secrets of the outer and inner worlds. The falling of apples had been observed since the beginning of creation, but it was Sir Isaac

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Newton's reflection and concentration on this fact that resulted in the formulation of the law of gravitation.

Yet meditation is more than concentration. In the philosophies of Yoga and Vedanta, meditation is a mental process by which the meditator becomes one with the object of meditation. Concentration (Sanskrit *dharana*) is the preliminary stage of this process; when concentration becomes effortless and continuous, it takes the form of meditation *(dhyana)*, in which the mind flows continuously toward its object. The culmination of meditation is total absorption *(samadhi)* in the object of meditation.

The sacred texts define concentration as one-pointed focus on any fixed object, internal or external. When we are able to keep the mind focused on a specific object uninterruptedly for twelve seconds, we are said to achieve one unit of concentration. Twelve such successive units of concentration make one unit of meditation, and twelve such successive units of meditation lead to *samadhi*. So concentration, meditation, and absorption are three different depths of meditation, which culminates in absorption into the object meditated upon.

We have said that concentration is the way to learn about a subject. But the only way to gain complete knowledge of the true nature of anything is to follow concentration to its conclusion and completely unite or identify with the thing known. Until then, knowledge of a person or a thing is nothing more than what we think about that person or object. Meditation, then, is the only way to full, correct knowledge.

Meditation is different from reflective reasoning. Reasoning is satisfied if it merely achieves a clear conception of things, whereas meditation seeks a direct perception of them. Reasoning is a function of the head, while meditation is a function of the heart, the abode of God. Rational conviction alone can never put an end to doubt and has no power to transform us. It cannot correct the imbalance between passion and reason, desire and dispassion. It cannot uproot our worldly propensities, the seeds of which can be destroyed only through meditation. Meditation integrates our countless discordant urges into the central goal of life, Self-Realization. Our desires, instincts, and impulses, like various musical instruments in an orchestra, are brought together in a grand symphony of unified rhythm and melody.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Meditation is more than contemplation. Contemplation is thinking about the Divine, but meditation is the spontaneous flow of the mind toward It. The contemplative state may be compared to a bee buzzing around a flower, about to alight on it and sip the nectar from it. The state of meditation is reached when the bee is already seated on the flower and has begun to taste the sweetness of the nectar.

Sometimes meditation is linked with prayer, but there is an important distinction between the two. Prayer functions in a dualistic way, in that it is directed to a personal deity or a divine personality whom we perceive as being separate from us. In meditation, that seeming dualism is resolved. It may be that meditation begins with effort, with articles of faith, and with anthropomorphic images and symbols, but it always ends in absorption into the Divine, which is beyond all form, name, and concept. Images, concepts, and symbols are used as mere stepping-stones in this spiritual venture. So it is said that in prayer we talk to God, while in meditation we listen to the soundless voice of God within us. In prayer we commune with the Divine, but in meditation we achieve union with It.

Meditation is the highest form of worship. In worship, says Shankaracharya, a person renounces his external activities and "worships in the sacred and stainless shrine of Atman, which is independent of time, place, and distance; which is present everywhere."[2] The Atman, or Self, is the true internal shrine at which we worship when we meditate. At an external shrine, a holy place where pious devotees go on pilgrimage, there are certain disadvantages. For example, the place may be situated at a great distance, so that pilgrimage entails physical effort and suffering. The comfort of the pilgrims may be disturbed by the weather, and thieves or unscrupulous priests may give them trouble. One may be limited to going only at specific times, since the merit of a pilgrimage is said to depend on the auspiciousness of the season. Further, the merit accruing from a conventional pilgrimage is not everlasting. But one who worships at the sacred shrine of Atman is free from all these disadvantages and obstacles.

Communion with our true Self, according to the *Mahabharata*, is the most efficacious form of meditation, comparable to bathing in a sacred river: "The river of Atman is filled with the water of self-control; truth is its current, righteous conduct its banks,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

consciousness and discovers innovative ways of meeting the challenges of life. In English the word *meditation* is derived from the Latin *meditari,* which derives from the same root as the word meaning "to heal." The practice of meditation sets in motion a process that leads to the restoration of our well-being—physical, mental, and spiritual.

Just as music is enjoyable because of the pauses of silence between the notes, so meditation likewise provides the pause that makes our activities enjoyable. Just as there are foods for the body and the mind, so meditation provides food for the soul. The world may talk of love, compassion, and sympathy, but love is a misnomer unless it is liberated through meditation from the attachments of selfishness. Meditation is the inbreathing of the soul. Without this inbreathing, we first die a spiritual death, alienated from our own depths of being, followed by psychological and physiological death.

Meditation overcomes the fear of death, which lies at the root of all fears. The diverse manifestations of this primal fear are anxiety, despair, depression, possessiveness, attachments, and aversions. Fear arises when we treat the body as an end unto itself. Meditation reveals that body and mind are mere instruments of the soul for self-fulfillment, and never ends in themselves. The philosophy of meditation teaches that creative living is never possible unless we accept the inevitability of our physical death and keep ourselves ready for it. The life-wish and the death-wish go together. In meditation we die in a measured way to our old self, and simultaneously we become reborn in our new self. A neurotic wants to run away from the death-wish and accepts only the life-wish. Frustrated, he falls victim to his own fears. Meditation teaches a deepening of self-awareness, so that we realize: I am not the body, which belongs to the order of the organic world and is subject to its mechanical laws. Feelings and emotions are psychological. My ego is just a function of the psyche. I am the true Self, beyond all polarities and tensions. My breath belongs to the universal breath, my eyes are the sun and the moon. I am the all-pervading Self shining in every heart.

Meditation liberates us from the bondage of the mind and body, and lifts us up into the vast expanse of the Infinite Self. By raising the blaze of consciousness within us, it burns all that is dross and false in us. Shankaracharya compares meditation to a source of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

friction that kindles the fire of knowledge: "By constant meditation (comparable to the rubbing of the firewood) is kindled the flame of Knowledge, which completely burns up the fuel of ignorance."[9]

Life is plagued by pain and suffering. Suffering is the first of the four noble truths of Buddha's message to the world.[10] Sorrow, indeed, is the price of our birth on earth. It afflicts both body and mind. Any glimpses of happiness that may be seen to brighten our days on earth are both fugitive and deceptive. Every enjoyment is moved by haunting fear. The rich are afraid of robbers, the beautiful of deformity, the healthy of disease, the learned of rivals, the aristocrats of dishonor, the virtuous of slander. Yet a human individual somehow forgets this brutal fact in the rhapsody of momentary happiness.

Why do we suffer? Some attribute suffering to luck, some to the stars, some to the retribution of God, and some to external circumstances. According to the seers of Yoga and Vedanta, suffering is self-created, and the causes are five: loss of contact with the real, ego and egotism, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. Loss of contact with our true Self gives rise to ego—the false, limited, finite self—which projects a world of dream and fancy and forces us to live in that world. Driven by the promptings of the ego, we strive for the impossible. It is the ego that polarizes our mind and creates the world of good and evil, and pain and pleasure. The harvest of egotistic living is fatigue and failure, anxiety and frustration. The more the ego creates a "me" and "mine" world, the more it gets choked up and pushed into isolation, and thereby gets set against its own reality. Denial of our true Self is the surest and shortest way to disintegration and doom. The practice of meditation brings us in contact with our true Self, endows us with a realistic cosmic vision where everything falls in its right place, and frees us from the cramped life of endless craving and cringing.

Meditation awakens the dormant powers of the mind. Just as a vast amount of energy is hidden in an atom, so too is there a vast reservoir of energy hidden in the depths of our psyche. The sacred texts of Yoga and Vedanta call this sleeping power of the mind *kundalini.* Life becomes blessed when the *kundalini* is awakened. Using the power of the mind, human beings have been able to achieve great wonders in the realm of science and technology. It is

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the same power of the mind that makes impossible things possible in the realm of spirituality. The story of the evolution of life is the story of the manifestation of mental powers.

The quest for our spiritual Self is the primary urge of life. Discovery of this Self is the key to our true well-being and our highest fulfillment. Three basic desires motivate all living beings: the desire for immortality, the desire for unlimited awareness, and the desire for unbounded joy. Through our toil and tears, pleasure and pain, hope and despair, life and death, we are all trying to fulfill these desires. Only the knowledge of our true Self can accomplish this goal. There is no rest, no peace, until the Self is known. By knowing the Self, which is all-pervading like the sky, we realize our immortal nature. By experiencing the bliss of this Self, we go beyond all conventions and limitations. By the light of this Self, we see everything enlightened. The maladies of this life are due to separative existence, governed by the law of relativity and change. The entire universe is on the move to know this Self. It is the frantic search of the parts for the whole. When we are forced by the laws of nature to evolve and change, we call it the law of evolution. When we make a conscious search for the Self, we call it a spiritual quest. Communion with this Self is possible only through meditation.

Some people argue that the spiritual quest is escapism and that Self-Knowledge, communion with the Divine, ecstasy, and beatific vision are merely the results of suppression or sublimation of the libido. For them, contemplation and meditation are lapses into inactivity and inertia. They believe that experiences of the superconscious state are delusions caused by repression of physical and mental urges. Denouncing the spiritual quest, "medical materialists" say that "extraordinary conscientiousness is due to overstimulated nerves. Melancholy is due to a torpid liver. The apostle St. Paul's vision on the road to Damascus was possible simply because he was an epileptic. St. Teresa of Ávila, the Christian mystic, was a hysterical woman. George Fox's discontent with the shams of the world was a symptom of a disordered colon."[11]

Critics of the spiritual life ask for action and good deeds, not contemplation; for participation in the world, not withdrawal from it. They say that meditation is selfish and life-negating. Life is action, participation, interaction, and communication. Can one afford to

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

lapse into passive solitude when cries of suffering are heard everywhere? Should we sit back in silence when we are needed by the world for its welfare? The contemplative is a quitter, an escapist who justifies his escapism in the name of spiritual quest. Meditation in silence is a narcissistic dialogue with one's own ego—a futile endeavor to make the finite infinite. Meditation creates division and isolation, as opposed to union and communion. The peace of meditation is the peace of anesthesia.

To these arguments we may respond that doing good is never possible without first *being* good. Simply living together in itself does not bring about communion. Union is not the same as merging with mass opinion and mass thinking. Action without meditation will only be reaction. The well-being of a person, whether material or psychological, stems from spiritual well-being. All maladies have their roots in the spiritual. The rise of a person begins with spiritual awakening, and the fall begins with spiritual eclipse. Spiritual eclipse brings moral eclipse, which in turn paves the way for psychological and physical slides. The immortality of a person depends on the discovery of spiritual individuality, and meditation is the only way to discover it.

A knower of Self becomes a saint and a true humanitarian. The gift of sainthood makes it possible for him to really love others, through the realization that he is one of them and one with them. The basis of this love is not self-love but love for the Self in all. The saints alone demonstrate the reality of God, the validity of the sacred texts, and the true meaning of love and compassion and concern for the welfare of all beings. The one who has learned this truth—the knower of Self—demonstrates the realization of it by setting an example.

Our true sanity and well-being are not determined by opinion polls or by the whims of social changes, but by the knowledge of truth, and truth is no respecter of social changes. Society must obey truth or perish, and meditation leads us to the shrine of truth. Let us approach this inner shrine and become knowers of Self.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

2. The Meditative State

Do you know what one feels in meditation? The mind becomes like a continuous flow of oil—it thinks of one object only, and that is God. It is not aware of anything else.
—*Sri Ramakrishna*[1]

Meditation is of the nature of a vision. According to Jiva Goswami,* it is nothing but "worship of the Divine in a definite form."[2] Rupa Goswami, in his *Bhaktirasamritasindhu,* mentions four types of meditation: meditation on the specific form of the Divine, meditation on His qualities, meditation on His divine sport (*lila,* the joyful "play" of creation), and meditation as service to Him.

The *Kularnava Tantra* describes meditation as the process of thinking of one's Chosen Ideal (*Ishtadevata* or Ishtam) in the heart after having controlled all the activities of the senses. The Chosen Ideal means that form of divinity which is most beloved to the worshipper. In India, for example, some sects worship the Lord as Vishnu, while for others the Chosen Ideal is Shiva. Thus, the *Mahanirvana Tantra* says that through meditation the spiritual aspirant identifies himself with Vishnu, whereas the *Shiva Purana* defines meditation as constant reflection and concentration on Shiva.

Meditation is no ordinary concentration; it is the highest form of spiritual concentration. Concentration becomes spiritual when it is conscious, active, and focused on one single spiritual object, within oneself or outside oneself. In this concentration, the whole attention,

*Jiva Goswami, a sixteenth-century spiritual master, was one of six "Goswamis," or Vaishnava priests, who taught the *bhakti yoga* of Lord Chaitanya.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

physical and mental, the nervous system and the unconscious mind, is mobilized and focused on the chosen object. When the mental focus is not conscious and deliberate, it is considered a lower type of concentration. This occurs when people watch a movie or listen to a song, or when they are aroused by anger or greed. Such subconscious, lower concentration dissipates psychic energy to a great extent. If physical work and exercise involve the use of physical energy, then worry, anxiety, and mental restlessness deplete psychic energy. Further, subconscious concentration on diverse subjects creates scattered channels of energy that are not regular and straight. Such haphazard concentration creates endless whirlpools in the mind and body. Meditation restores this energy balance. It counteracts the effects of wrong concentration, whether conscious or subconscious.

Various images have been used to convey what the state of meditation is like. The ordinary mind bounces about like a Ping-Pong ball, but meditation is a state of inner absorption in which the mind, like a lump of dough, remains fixed on the object of meditation. The *Bhagavad Gita* compares this inner absorption to the steady flame of a lamp sheltered in a windless place.[3] Patanjali, the author of the ancient *Yoga Sutras,* describes this state as the continuous flow of the whole mind toward the object of concentration:[4] it is like the unbroken flow of oil poured from one vessel into another. According to the *Shrimad Bhagavatam,* this is a state in which the meditator becomes one with the object of meditation.[5] Ramanuja considers this state to be loving meditation.[6]

The state of meditation is reached by a process of gradual merging. It is said that speech is merged in the mind, then the mind in the intellect, and finally the intellect in the indwelling Self. At the culmination of meditation, the individualized consciousness becomes completely merged in the infinite expanse of absolute and all-pervading Pure Consciousness; this is called *samadhi* in both Yoga and Vedanta. *Samadhi* leads to the ultimate goal of union with the Self. It is like a piece of ice slowly getting dissolved in the water of the ocean.

Meditation is not just one of many spiritual practices; it is the consummation of all spiritual practices, irrespective of the seeker's philosophy and creed. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: "The *sandhya*

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in *samadhi.*"[7] That is, ritualistic worship and prayer merge in the Gayatri, which is the highest and most concentrated prayer of the Vedas. The Gayatri then becomes further concentrated into the sacred word Om, from which all words emanate; and, finally, Om merges in the profound silence of *samadhi.* Meditation is thus the culmination of all worship, the state before the final revelation.

There are three components of every form of worship: the object of worship, the act of worship, and the worshipper. In the beginning, the three are distinct from one another, but in the end, the three merge into one. This unitary state of absorption in the object of worship is the goal of all meditation. In the state of *samadhi,* truth is revealed in its pristine purity. Meditation reveals that our true nature is divine. Our true self is the focus of the all-pervading Universal Self. Vedanta calls this revelation Self-Knowledge; Yoga calls it Self-Realization; Buddhism designates it as *bodhi* (awakening to one's buddha-nature) or *prajna* (wisdom); and in Christianity, it is beatific vision.

It is not that the seeker attains the state of meditation, but rather the opposite: he or she is taken over by it. Just as a weary person is overcome by sleep, in spite of all efforts to remain awake, similarly a spiritual seeker, weary of the world and its false promises, is taken over by the state of *samadhi,* the boundless and fathomless ocean of silence. Sri Ramakrishna says that one of the signs that meditation is being rightly practiced is that "a bird will sit on your head, thinking you are an inert thing."[8] The meditator becomes so one-pointed that he sees and hears nothing: "He will not be conscious even of touch. A snake may crawl over his body, but he will not know it. Neither of them will be aware of the other."[9]

The depth of the seeker's inner absorption is measured by the intensity of three kinds of spontaneous transcendence. First, when he loses himself in the state of inner absorption, he transcends the idea of time and therefore becomes oblivious of the lapse of time. Second, he transcends the idea of place and is not aware of the surrounding environment. And third, he completely transcends his I-consciousness and all thoughts about himself. The mind in the state of absorption is compared to an empty stage from which all the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

actors have exited, but where the lights still shine on the empty stage. In the state of absorption, the seeker witnesses the true light of the Self, pure and blissful.

In the state of meditation, one becomes *videha,* or detached from body-consciousness. It is the only direct way to separate the soul from the bondages of body and mind. Prayer, sacraments, and the like are merely indirect means. The *Atma Gita* explains this through an analogy: By uprooting the body, which is compared to a huge rock, and digging the field of the mind using intellect as the spade, the inner treasure of the Self can be uncovered.[10] Just as there is no other way to obtain a treasure hidden in the bowels of the earth except digging, so there is no other method except meditation to attain the final goal of finding one's own Self.

In meditation we gain spiritual altitude by rising to the higher planes. The Vedas describe seven planes of the mind, which are correlated with the energy centers (chakras) in the body. Meditation begins when we reach the fourth plane, located near the heart, and culminates when we reach the crown of the head, which is the seventh plane. Sri Ramakrishna explains:

> When the mind is immersed in worldliness, it dwells in the three lower planes—at the navel, the organ of generation, and the organ of evacuation. In that state the mind loses all its higher visions—it broods only on "woman and gold."* The fourth plane of the mind is at the heart. When the mind dwells there, one has the first glimpse of spiritual consciousness. One sees light all around....
>
> The fifth plane of the mind is at the throat. When the mind reaches this, the aspirant becomes free from all ignorance and illusion. He does not enjoy talking or hearing about anything but God. If people talk about worldly things, he leaves the place at once.
>
> The sixth plane is at the forehead. When the mind reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God day and night.

*"Woman and gold" was Sri Ramakrishna's way of saying "lust and greed." The English phrase is a translation of the Bengali *kamini-kanchan,* in which the word *kamini* implies a seductress—it does not mean woman in general. So Sri Ramakrishna did not mean that women are the cause of lust; in fact, when addressing women, he warned them against "man and gold."

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> But even then a little trace of ego remains. At the sight of that incomparable beauty of God's form, one becomes intoxicated and rushes forth to touch and embrace it. But one doesn't succeed. It is like the light inside a lantern. One feels as if one could touch the light, but one cannot on account of the pane of glass.
>
> In the top of the head is the seventh plane. When the mind rises there, one goes into *samadhi*. Then the Brahmajnani [knower of Brahman] directly perceives Brahman. But in that state his body does not last many days. He remains unconscious of the outer world. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out....[11]

Meditation can also be described as diving deep within ourselves. Each time we dive, we touch the Ground of our being and undergo permanent transformation; and when we surface, we express that transformation in our actions and conduct. At the same time, in meditation we reach a great height of realization, where the idea of time appears to be a reflection of the timeless. We enter into a sanctuary that is the holiest of the holy shrines and temples.

By means of meditation we dredge through the five layers of our being, described by the sacred texts of Yoga and Vedanta as five sheaths *(koshas)*, each representing a different density of matter. They are the body, the vital force, the mind, the intellect, and the sheath of bliss. The sheaths are pictured as interpenetrating, one inside the other, like the segments of a collapsible telescope, the physical sheath being the outermost and the sheath of bliss the innermost.

The five sheaths may be compared to five different lampshades that obscure the effulgent Self within. The light of the Self shines through them in varying degrees, depending upon their different densities. When the five sheaths are negated, the reflections of ignorance in them are also negated, and then our true Self, eternal and all-pervading, is revealed. By realizing this true Self, an embodiment of bliss free from the taint of sin and the fear of death, a mortal human individual attains the highest fulfillment.

In meditation we consciously pass through the three states of our consciousness—waking, dreaming, and deep sleep—and try to

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

reach the fourth dimension of our being, *Turiya* ("the fourth"), which is the state of the Self. The first three states are all in the realm of the mind. The same mind divides itself into subject and object in all three states. The fourth is different from these three. The *Mandukya Upanishad* describes it as the following:

> *Turiya* is not that which is conscious of the inner (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the outer (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of consciousness. It is unperceived (by any sense organs), incomprehensible (to the mind), unrelated (to any object), uninferrable, unthinkable, and indescribable. It is essentially of the nature of Consciousness, constituting the Self alone, and is the negation of all phenomena; It is peace, bliss, and One without a second. It is known as *Turiya,* the Fourth. It is Atman, and It is to be realized.[12]

Shankaracharya wrote the following hymn in praise of *Turiya:*

> I bow to Brahman, which experiences (during the waking state) gross objects by covering the universe with the tendril-like rays of Its consciousness, enfolding all movable and immovable entities; which, further, experiences during the dream state the objects produced by the mind due to desire; and which again, in deep sleep, absorbs the various particulars and enjoys bliss, while making us also experience, through *maya,* the same bliss—I bow to the supreme, immortal, and birthless Brahman, designated in terms of *maya* as *Turiya,* the Fourth.
>
> May that *Turiya,* which, as the World Soul, experiences in the waking state gross objects, good and evil; which, again, experiences in the dream state other and subtle objects produced by Its own mind and illumined by Its own light; and which, lastly, in dreamless sleep withdraws all objects and remains devoid of distinctions—may that attributeless *Turiya* protect us![13]

The meditative state is not a passive state of mind, as many erroneously believe. On the contrary, it is an intensely active and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

conscious condition. As a wheel intensely revolving at high speed appears unmoving, similarly an intensely active mind, taking the form of one single thought, is perceived as still and tranquil. Meditators choose consciously and voluntarily to die to the life of false hope, fantasy, and desire, and simultaneously to become reborn into the life eternal. It is a letting go of the ego's kingdom so that the Kingdom of God, as Christ said, may come forth.[14]

Through meditation we live many lives in one life with an intense speed. We regain our sanity, our correct vision, our umbilical cord to the cosmos, and our faith in our inescapable spiritual destiny. Life begins with the question "Who am I?" The inquiry continues through different stages of evolution, through joy and sorrow, through birth and death, through our sojourns in heaven and on earth. The decisive answer to this question finally comes in the depths of our meditation, and the answer is "I am He"—in Sanskrit, *So'ham*, one of the sacred formulas of Advaita Vedanta, in which "He" refers to the immortal Spirit.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

3. The Goal of Meditation

The goal of meditation is communion or union with the Ultimate Reality. Different systems of thought and different religions call it by different names: beatific vision of God, *nirvana,* awakening, enlightenment, *kaivalya* (freedom of the self), union of the individual soul (Shakti) with the Oversoul (Shiva), Self-Knowledge or knowledge of Brahman, attaining the Kingdom of Heaven within, entry into the Promised Land, and receiving the "pearl of great price."[1] This is the goal of all goals of life. Longing for this goal distinguishes a human individual from the subhuman beings. An ancient Sanskrit verse says that a human individual without longing for the Divine is merely an animal in human form. Sri Ramakrishna says: "He is born to no purpose, who, having the rare privilege of being born a man, is unable to realize God in this life."[2] All other goals of life, when they are not subordinated to this supreme goal, prove to be destructive.

The seers of the Vedas mention four goals of life: knowledge of the sacred and secular, worldly prosperity, fulfillment of legitimate desires, and Self-Knowledge. Self-Knowledge is the consummation of all the other goals. Wealth and prosperity, when they are not used for Self-Knowledge, create delusion and fantasy. Morality and ethics, when they are not for the sake of Self-Knowledge, degenerate into enlightened ego. Art and aesthetics, when they do not reflect the unity of the all-pervading Self, degenerate into promiscuity. Science and technology, when they are not for this goal, prove to be dangerous weapons of self-destruction.

Another Vedic verse says that for the sake of the interests of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the family, a person should sacrifice his own self-interest; for the sake of the country, he should sacrifice his family; for the sake of the world, he should sacrifice his country; and for the sake of Self-Knowledge, he should sacrifice everything. Any object of desire when it does not reflect the reality of the Self is haunted by the shadow of death.

According to the Upanishads, a mortal attaining this Self becomes immortal. In pursuit of this Self-Knowledge, we break through the different layers of our consciousness, shear through the formations of our ego, and plummet deep into our real nature. Self-Knowledge cannot be described in words, but after attaining it we are never the same again. With that knowledge, the walls that seem to separate us from the rest of the universe disappear. The dualities of subject and object, knower and known, seer and seen, all merge in the indescribable expanse of the Absolute. Consciousness of time and space is obliterated, and the fetters of causality are broken forever. Through Self-Knowledge we discover who we really are. No sacrifice is too great to achieve this goal; no effort in this venture is ever lost or wasted. In praise of Self-Knowledge, the *Bhagavad Gita* says:

> That in which the mind, restrained by the practice of concentration, rests quiescent; that in which, seeing the Self through the self, one rejoices in one's own Self;
>
> That in which one knows the boundless joy beyond the reach of the senses and grasped only by the understanding; that in which being established, one never departs from Reality;
>
> That on gaining which one thinks there is no greater gain, and wherein established one is not moved even by the heaviest of sorrows—
>
> Let that be known as yoga, which is severance from the contact of pain. It is to be practiced with perseverance and with an undaunted mind.[3]

Self-Knowledge is immortality, which is spiritual and never physical. It does not mean going to some place after death or attaining something new or novel. It is the discovery that the soul in each

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

of us is the selfsame, the focus of the all-pervading Self. It is the Soul of all souls. Birth and death affect the body and mind, which have a beginning and a natural end. Experiences of heaven and hell all belong to the mind, which, with its desires, produces our physical body. If our real nature had been mortal, then we could never attain immortality. The doctrine that the soul is created at the time of birth and then lives forever lacks a rational basis. It does not explain the fact of the inequalities between one person and another in the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual spheres. To attribute these inequalities to the will of God is to make God cruel and brutal. To explain them in terms of education and environment is inadequate. The doctrine of eternal happiness in heaven goes against logic. Everlasting life in terms of time is irrational. Again, the doctrine of eternal damnation is inconsistent with God's love for His creatures. According to that view, since most people die as sinners, they must suffer torments after death. To believe in the eternal punishment of a soul for the mistakes of a few years is to go against the dictates of reason.

We cannot say that life ends with death. If death gives finality to human existence, then, as the British author W. MacNeile Dixon said, "There is nothing to be hoped for, nothing to be expected and nothing to be done save to await our turn to mount the scaffold and bid farewell to the colossal blunder, the much-ado-about-nothing world."[4]

Immortality of the soul alone gives stability and hope for our life. So the Vedas exhort: "Know thyself, and give up all other vain words." According to the Vedic seers, Self-Knowledge is more precious than offspring, wealth, and all the meritorious actions prescribed by religion. The *Katha Upanishad* warns:

> What is here, the same is there; and what is there, the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees any difference here.[5]

> Whatever there is—the whole universe—vibrates because it has gone forth from Brahman, which exists as its Ground. That Brahman is a great terror, like a poised thunderbolt. Those who know It become immortal.[6]

> There is one Supreme Ruler, the inmost Self of all beings,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

who makes His one form manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves—not to others.[7]

A knower of the Self is called a free soul. His Self-Knowledge liberates him from desire, fear, and death. Physical death and birth have no meaning for him, a change of body being like a change of garment or like passing from one room to another. His compassion for living beings is without bounds. He enjoys the world by seeing it as a dynamic manifestation of the one all-pervading Reality. He is like a person who knows that what he beholds is a display of magic; he does not consider it to be real, yet he enjoys the performance to his heart's content. He is conscious that he feels through all hearts, walks with all feet, eats through all mouths, and thinks with all minds. He regards the pain and pleasure of others as his own pain and pleasure. He is free but not whimsical, spontaneous but not given to license. He does not practice meditation, but meditation pursues him all the time. The virtues of humility, unselfishness, purity, and kindness, which he had practiced to attain, now adorn him like so many jewels. His body becomes a living, moving temple. The knowledge of the free soul is the true light. His soul comes out of the body purer and brighter, like a snake that has shed its skin. As milk poured into milk becomes one with the milk, as water poured into water becomes one with the water, as oil poured into oil becomes one with the oil, so the free soul absorbed in Brahman becomes one with Brahman.

Self-Knowledge, the goal of meditation, is an all-engulfing, direct realization of God as the Reality of all realities. The scriptures merely give various suggestions about God, not descriptions or experiences of Him. Philosophy is speculative. Emotions and sentiments rise and fall. None of these can dispel our doubts and give finality to the proof of God's existence. Direct realization alone can dispel all doubt.

Direct realization leads us to see God face to face, beyond philosophy, theology, emotion, reason, and other structures of religion. Without direct realization, we may mistake the imaginary for the Real. Direct realization is like seeing a country with our own eyes, rather than hearing about it from others or reading about it

55644.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

in books or newspapers. With the dawning of direct realization, all the language of religion falls away. Monotheism, polytheism, dualism, nondualism—words are of no further use at that stage. The seeker discovers that God, the Ultimate Reality, whom he was seeking in temples and churches, in shrines and places of pilgrimage, was ever-present in his heart. God, whom he was searching for, was also searching for him. Meditation is the only way to attain direct realization.

Direct realization is the goal of the spiritual quest. This realization is more than blind belief, intellectual conviction, or an emotional thrill. It is knowing the Reality by being one with It, and is a total response of the whole mind. Knowing is more than believing. To believe in something without verification is to merely adopt the belief of some other person. We believe in something that we do not really know. Reasoning, too, is not knowing. Reasoning begins with doubt and also ends in doubt. Reasoning may indicate possibility or probability but can never arrive at certainty.

In the name of reason, we most often rationalize. Our so-called rational conviction is the result of a mental process that obeys the herd instinct. Tradition and convention influence us heavily and determine what we call rational. The reality of God cannot be proved or disproved by reason. Emotional experiences, too, do not constitute direct realization. They come and go and are often the result of mere sentimentalism. Such realization has no lasting value because it does not transform us.

Ordinarily we perceive everything through the prism of our mind with its built-in predispositions. Direct realization is perceiving things and beings as they really are, not in terms of what we think of them. It depends for its validation on three factors: scriptures, reason, and personal experience. Scriptures provide the seeker with a spiritual hypothesis, but they cannot be a substitute for direct experience, just as reading about a country, no matter how well described, cannot take the place of seeing it with one's own eyes. So what has been studied in the scriptures must be subjected to vigorous reasoning. Honest doubts must be resolved. Finally, after being intellectually convinced of the soundness of what has been studied, the seeker must meditate on it again and again.

Neither the scripture nor reasoning nor experience can inde-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

pendently create genuine direct realization. One who depends solely upon the scriptures becomes dogmatic. Reasoning often conceals the rationalization of a person's desires: one uses reason to prove what one wants to prove. Personal experience by itself can also be deceptive, in that it may project one's own favorite ideas. But when all the three factors jointly lead to the same conclusion, we can be reasonably assured of having reached direct realization.

Direct realization does not depend upon supernatural authorities, which may be shaken by science, nor on historical evidence, which may be contradicted by new discoveries. Direct realization carries its own irresistible testimony. It silences all our doubts, gives certainty to our conviction, and transforms us permanently. Again, direct realization transcends reason just as adulthood transcends childhood; it is never negated by any other subsequent experience and is always conducive to the welfare of all beings.

Direct experience is intuitive. Intuition is the mature form of reason, just as reason is the mature form of instinct. Plotinus describes intuition as another intellect, different from that which reasons and is called rational. Al-Ghazali, the Persian mystic of the eleventh century, has likened intuition to immediate perception, like touching an object with one's hand. Saint Bernard called it the unhesitating apprehension of truth. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote of it as the faculty that gives a vision of truth.

But the experience of realization is not a sudden revelation or a spiritual windfall. It cannot be attained miraculously or vicariously, and there is no shortcut to it. The way to attain direct realization is the repeated practice of meditation. Practice is required to convert intellectual conviction into spiritual realization. Practice is also needed to develop concentration of mind, for the mere absence of mental agitation does not automatically bring spiritual concentration. Such concentration calls for repeated efforts with undaunted enthusiasm over a long period. Practice is necessary to align our thought, word, and deed to the goal. This alignment also does not come automatically. Practice is necessary for the purification of the mind.

It must be emphasized that Self-Knowledge or the vision of God is not the *effect* of meditation. Meditation only purifies the heart and cleanses the doors of perception to reveal what is already self-existent. Reality is reflected in the mirror of the pure heart. The prac-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

tice of meditation is necessary because direct realization cannot be given to us by anybody. Nothing happens by chance. The descent of divine grace depends upon self-surrender, and the practice of meditation is really an effort toward self-surrender.

The practice of meditation is necessary not only for spiritual attainment but also for spiritual enjoyment. The spiritual quest is a conscious journey to the realm of the Ultimate with many wonderful experiences at different stages. There is relish in the name of God, serenity in meditation, the ecstasy of divine inebriation, the bliss of total absorption in God-consciousness, and the joy of self-dedication to the welfare of all beings. The seeker is rewarded with these incomparable experiences as he or she advances along the way.

Direct realization is the result of our being one with the Real. There is a difference between what we perceive as real and what is really real, because our senses deceive us. We know that the sky is not blue even though it appears to be so. To the ordinary mind, a wooden table is just a table, but to a scientist it is a mass of electrons. What we perceive in the outer world is merely a reflection of what exists within us. In everyday life, what we know about a person is only what we think about that person, not what that person really is. Through meditation we try to see the Real in ourselves first, so that we can see the same Reality everywhere and in everyone. In order to see God in everything with eyes open, we must first see God in ourselves with eyes closed.

At first we go to the outside world in search of direct realization, and look for it in temples and holy sanctuaries. But we never find the Ultimate anywhere outside. As a straight line infinitely extended forward ultimately makes a circle and comes back to where it started, so, too, do we come back to ourselves and begin the search within. Swami Vivekananda says:

> It is impossible to find God outside ourselves. Our own souls contribute all the divinity that is outside us. We are the greatest temple. The objectification is only a faint imitation of what we see within ourselves. Concentration of the powers of the mind is our only instrument to help us see God. If you know one soul—your own—you know all souls,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

past, present, and to come. The will concentrates the mind; certain things excite and control this will, such as reason, love, devotion, and breathing. The concentrated mind is a lamp that shows us every corner of the soul.[8]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

4. The Benefits of Meditation

The benefits of meditation are threefold: spiritual, mental, and physical. Meditation brings spiritual illumination. This illumination alone can liberate the soul from the trappings of the body-mind complex. It alone can silence doubt and endow us with unshakable faith in our spiritual destiny. Shankaracharya says: "The true nature of things is to be known *personally,* through the eye of clear illumination, and not through a sage; what the moon exactly is, is to be known with one's own eyes; can others make one know it?"[1]

Spiritual illumination has its manifestation on the mental level in the form of poise, peace, naturalness, serenity, stability of emotions, conservation of energy, and a capacity to bear the frustrations of life. Liberation of the soul brings with it liberation of the emotions and intellect. Meditation liberates the mind/body system from bondage to the opposites and enables the physical and psychic energies to flow into creative, constructive channels instead of burning out in destructive forms. From being a creature of circumstances, the meditator begins to be a creator by rising above the bondages of ego. Most mental disorders arise from extreme egocentrism and self-preoccupation, which results in inhibitions, anxiety, and paralysis of the will. The freeing of the individual from the effects of such selfishness is one of the benefits of meditation.

Through meditation we discover that our true self is separate and different from the body and mind. Meditation is a liberation for both the immortal and the mortal body and mind. Essentially, liberation is freeing ourselves from ourselves. The observed results are

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

an unagitated voice, relaxed neck muscles, a kindly appearance, a tension-free gait, and grace and charm in all actions. Meditation brings complete behavioral transformation. A new worldview induces a new quality of consciousness, which leads to a change in interpersonal relationships. According to the *Bhagavad Gita,* contact with the Ultimate through meditation alone can give us peace and happiness. "The man whose mind is not under his control has no Self-Knowledge and no contemplation either. Without contemplation, he can have no peace, and without peace, how can he have happiness?"[2] Meditation teaches us to act and not to react. A life without meditation is like a horse without reins, an automobile without a steering wheel, a ship without a compass, or an airplane without a cockpit.

Emotions consume us and can leave us almost exhausted. A degree of emotional maturity is necessary so that we can develop an adequate reserve of mental energy for use in finding creative solutions to the problems of life. The practice of meditation brings about that stability of emotions. We are too often in love with ourselves, clinging to both our possessions and our possessiveness. We shut our eyes to glimpses of the whole truth while busying ourselves with partial truths. Creative living calls for the practice of detachment. Our body with its hormonal control mechanisms exercises its restraining power over us; we are attached to it and one with it. Meditation teaches that body and mind are subject to the laws of decay and disintegration. A practice of disidentification through meditation frees us from the mortal fear of death. That which is impermanent is known as such. Self-identity is transferred from the physical-mental level to the spiritual level. Body and mind are perceived as vehicles to serve the purpose of the spirit. Meditation endows a person with increased capacity of the mind by releasing its dormant power. By participating in the peace and serenity of the soul, the mind becomes rejuvenated and strengthened and regains its lost vigor, resulting in increased capacity for tolerating the frustrations of life.

The third benefit of meditation manifests on the physical level. It brings good health, a good voice, and increased neuromuscular energy. It stops all wastage of vital energy. In the words of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad:* "The first signs of entering yoga are light-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

ness, health, absence of desire, a good complexion, a beautiful voice, an agreeable odor of the body, and slight excretions."[3]

Regarding the benefits of meditation, Swami Vivekananda says:

> Such is the power of yoga that even the least of it will bring a great amount of benefit. It will not hurt anyone but will benefit everyone. First of all, it will calm down nervous excitement, bring peace, enable us to see things more clearly. The temperament will be better and the health will be better. Sound health will be one of the first signs, and a beautiful voice. Defects in the voice will be changed. This will be among the first of the many effects that will come. Those who practice hard will get many other signs. Sometimes there will be sounds, as of a peal of bells heard at a distance, commingling and falling on the ear as one continuous sound. Sometimes things will be seen—little specks of light floating and becoming bigger and bigger; and when these things appear, know that you are progressing fast. Those who want to be yogis and to practice hard must be careful about their diet at first. But those who want only a little practice for an everyday, business sort of life—let them not eat too much; otherwise they may eat whatever they please.[4]

Moral purity requires the conquest of bodily desires such as lust and greed, and this is never possible without the practice of meditation and its allied spiritual practices. The Sanskrit word for continence is *brahmacharya*, which means dwelling on Brahman. To practice continence without dwelling on Brahman would be a madman's task. Body and mind do not give up the lower pleasures of life until they have tasted something higher and better. In the hours of meditation our physical energy is converted into spiritual energy and kept in storage at the higher centers of consciousness in the form of spiritual energy, known in the sacred texts as *ojas*. This *ojas* endows a pure person with a glow of purity. It adorns a saint as his halo. It endows a person with charisma and magnetic charm. The spiritual illumination gives a new orientation to everyday life, and this becomes evident in all one's movements and actions. One's

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

actions and thoughts become free and spontaneous. The mind, being clear and free from conflicts, is more efficient, effective, and creative. One never loses the vision of the whole while dealing with the parts. He stays strong and whole even in the midst of shattering disaster. He becomes economical in terms of conserving physical and mental energy, which keeps him vigorous. Meditation is the only way to attain Self-Knowledge, and only Self-Knowledge can put an end to all the sorrows and sufferings of life.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

5. Meditation in the System of Yoga

Meditation occupies an important place in the scheme of the spiritual practices of Hinduism. Among the variety of religious traditions that exist within Hinduism, some look upon meditation as a technique, some as intense mental worship, and others as the way to intense devotion. The two most widely practiced meditative traditions are Yoga and Vedanta.

By "Yoga" here we mean Patanjali's eightfold path of *raja yoga.* Yoga is the first comprehensive treatment of the subject of meditation in Hindu philosophy. Its conclusions are based not on mere theory or speculation, but on facts that have been tested time and again through practice. Its approach to life's problems is objective. Its analysis of the problems is scientific, and its way of overcoming them is pragmatic.

Yoga describes the Ultimate Reality as twofold: Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha, the Self, is distinguished from the body, senses, mind, and intellect; It is the immortal Pure Consciousness in each of us. The Self is not the brain, not the nervous system, not the aggregate of conscious states, all of which belong to Prakriti—the world of matter, inert and insentient. Our body, mind, and intellect are part of this world of matter. The human individual is essentially a layered being. Our true Self remains covered, yet unaffected, by the five layers *(koshas)* of body, vital force, mind, intellect, and bliss.

The conjunction of Purusha and Prakriti, of spirit and matter, creates individuality and multiplicity. The creative process by which the world comes into being is the evolution and involution of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Prakriti. Purusha does not act; as Pure Consciousness, It remains the passive witness of the material universe.

What brings spirit into contact with matter? The Yoga system gives the simile of a blind person and a lame person who cooperate in order to find their way out of a forest—the blind one carrying the lame one, who gives directions. Similarly, the nonintelligent Prakriti and the inactive Purusha combine and cooperate to serve their respective interests. Prakriti requires the presence of Purusha in order to be known and appreciated, and Purusha requires the help of Prakriti in order to discriminate itself from the latter and thereby attain liberation.

Self-Realization puts an end to the apparently interminable cycles of suffering. This end of suffering is known as freedom of the Self from the bonds of Prakriti. With the dawning of such Realization, the Self is no longer affected by the ceaseless changes of body and mind. Yoga philosophy likens this process to the performance of a dancing girl. Just as the dancing girl stops dancing once she has entertained the spectators, so Prakriti ceases to act and evolve the world once it has manifested its nature to the Self.

The causes of suffering and the obstacles that stand in the way of Self-Realization, according to the Yoga system, are five: ignorance, ego and egotism, attachment, aversion, and the desire to cling to life. Because of ignorance, a person sees the non-eternal as eternal, the impure as pure, the undesirable as desirable. Ignorance gives rise to ego, which projects an imaginary world of dreams and desires. Dwelling in that world, a person develops attachment to pleasure and aversion to pain. The ego polarizes the mind and creates its own version of good and evil. It instinctively clings to life and its dreams and desires.

The obstacles in the path, Yoga maintains, are not just thoughts and ideas. Having been repeated and reinforced over and over again, they have struck roots in the psyche and bodily chemistry, creating habits and conditionings, and becoming the determinants of our behavior and mental predispositions, called *samskaras*. *Samskaras* die hard. Time cannot erase them. Intellectual reasoning cannot obliterate them. The only solution is to neutralize them by developing counterimpressions.

The subtle impressions of past thoughts, *samskaras* remain

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

embedded in the mind *(chitta)* in different states. These states, according to Patanjali, are five: dormant, expanded, repressed, attenuated, and overcome. In the dormant stage, a *samskara* is latent. For example, a child may be born with hundreds of *samskaras,* but most of them remain unexpressed during childhood. Environment holds them in check. In the expanded state, *samskaras* become manifested or expressed when environmental and social conditions are favorable. Unfavorable conditions, such as social disapproval or fear of punishment, can keep particular *samskaras* (for example, lust and greed) in check. In the repressed state, *samskaras* continue to remain powerful, though inactive. In the attenuated state, when desires and impulses are consciously controlled by counter-impressions, the former become weak and lose their power.

Attenuation of *samskaras* is not the same as overcoming them. Just as seeds sprout when the ground is watered and fertilized, so also the attenuated *samskaras* become active when they are watered and fertilized by longing and stimulated by desire. But if the seeds are roasted in fire, they can never sprout. In the same way, when the *samskaras* are subjected to the fire of higher consciousness, they become burnt seeds. This is the state in which the impressions are overcome. Through repeated and continuous meditation and self-purification, the seeds of desires and impulses become burnt. Spiritual *samskaras,* created by the conscious practice of meditation on one object, fed by repetition, and fertilized by devotion, develop into strong *samskaras* that keeps all contrary *samskaras* in check. Just as a burnt rope may retain the shape of a rope but cannot bind anyone, so also an illumined soul's human traits, desires, and impulses are mere semblances and not real.

The Yoga system asserts that impure thought is to be countered by pure thought, impure imagination by pure imagination, uncontrolled speech by thoughtful speech, and bad bodily posture by good posture. Patanjali defines Yoga as "subjugation of the thought-waves of the mind."[1] The mind is like a lake that remains constantly agitated by distracting thought-waves *(vritti)*. Hence one does not see the Self that is the bottom of the lake. If the water of a lake is muddy, one is not able to see the bottom. But when the mud settles and the ripples subside, the bottom can be clearly seen. As water is clear by nature and the mud is extraneous to it, so also the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

natural tendency of the mind is to become tranquil, but because of the distractions and agitations of the senses, its surface remains disturbed. The aim of Yoga is to control the outgoing tendencies of the mind, the senses, and the body.

The mind never becomes controlled automatically; it must be controlled consciously. It can never be controlled if we yield to its desires. Unrestrained desires and unbridled gratification of libidinal urges only lead to disintegration and destruction. Neither can the mind be brought under control by ordinary, egocentric concentration. Such concentration only represses the *samskaras*, and repression heightens the awareness of the desired object. Control becomes successful when it is joined with regulated practice and discipline through which the controlled mind is directed to meditation on the indwelling Self.

Persuasion and reasoning are of no help in accomplishing this task. Yoga maintains that in order to control the mind, we must control the body and senses. Because the agitation of the mind becomes transferred to the body and the breath, the Yoga system teaches the practitioner to subdue the agitation of the body, mind, and senses with appropriate exercises and disciplines. Patanjali's Yoga believes that the way of reason *(jnana yoga)* is too weak to uproot the ingrained *samskaras*. Devotion *(bhakti yoga)* requires inborn faith in God, and the eradication of ego through selfless activity *(karma yoga)* is a slow process. Only strong willpower can bring the wayward mind back to tranquillity. The methodology of Yoga is to control the subconscious with the help of conscious efforts. Restlessness of the body is to be overcome by the practice of postures *(asanas)* conducive to tranquillity. Irregular breath, an indicator of mental restlessness, is to be made regular by breathing exercises. Impure thoughts and tendencies of the mind must be countered by the cultivation of moral and ethical virtues.

To attain the goal of Self-Realization, the Yoga system employs an eightfold system of practice consisting of the following steps, or "limbs":

1. Restraint *(yama)* calls for the cultivation of five virtues: nonviolence, truthfulness, noncovetousness, continence, and nonreceiving of gifts and favors. Violence, whether physi-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

cal, mental, or verbal, originates from lust and greed. It must be countered by practicing nonviolence in thought, word, and deed. Nonviolence denotes a respectful attitude and behavior toward all living beings, and its practice is founded on recognition of the underlying unity of life. Truthfulness means being true in thought, word and deed under all circumstances. The path of truth can be walked only by a person who is true in his intention and action. Noncovetousness means controlling the propensity of the mind for greed, which prompts a person to misappropriate things belonging to others. Continence is the key virtue in matters of self-control. It is observance of chastity in thought, word, and deed. Continence re-creates the body, mind, and nerves, infusing them with new vigor. Without continence, meditation is an empty dream. Nonreceiving of gifts and favors means remaining free and independent from the influence of others.

2. Discipline *(niyama)* constitutes five observances: cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study of the sacred texts (including repetition of sacred words or *mantras*), and surrendering the fruits of all action to the Divine. Cleanliness, when adhered to both externally (through bathing, pure diet, etc.) and internally (through purifying the mind), endows the seeker with a feeling of purity that brings in its wake a sense of aversion for one's own body and a disinclination to come into physical contact with others. By practicing cleanliness, one gains control of the organ of touch. Contentment is remaining satisfied with few material necessities procured without great effort. It is paring down desires to meet only those needs that are conducive to self-control. Austerity of body and mind is practicing control of the body, the organ of speech, and the mind. It is bearing with equanimity the pairs of opposites, such as heat and cold, pain and pleasure, and so forth. Austerity endows the seeker with strong willpower. Study of sacred texts is conducive to devotion and concentration. By surrendering the fruits of action to the Divine, a person grows in devotion, which culminates in concentration on the chosen ideal.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

3. Posture *(asana)* that is steady, with the limbs of the body remaining restful, is conducive for concentration and meditation. The spinal column must be held in such a way that the nerve currents are able to rise in the course of meditation. The follower of meditation is advised to sit erect, holding the back, neck, and head in a straight line, with the entire weight of the upper body resting on the ribs. With the chest out, one finds it easy to relax and concentrate.
4. Control of breath *(pranayama)*. According to the Yoga system, our breath is part of the cosmic energy *(prana)*. The breath supplies motive power to all the parts of the body. When the breath is regulated and made rhythmic, the mind becomes calm. The first sign of an uncontrolled mind is irregularity of breathing.
5. Withdrawal of mind *(pratyahara)* consists in training the mind to detach itself at will from each sense organ.
6. Concentration *(dharana)* is keeping the mind focused on an object for a certain length of time without interruption. The object may be internal or external.
7. Meditation *(dhyana)* begins when concentration becomes effortless and continuous, like the flow of oil poured from one vessel into another. In the Yoga system, mind has five levels: (a) dull and stupefied, (b) restless and turbulent, (c) distracted and divided, (d) concentrated and one-pointed, and (e) restrained and suspended. The first three levels are unfavorable for the practice of meditation, which begins only when the mind reaches the fourth level. Patanjali says, "Meditation is the uninterrupted concentration of thought on its object. This itself turns into *samadhi* when the object alone shines and the thought of meditation [and of the meditator] is lost, as it were."[2]
8. Absorption *(samadhi)* is attained when meditation becomes constant and continuous, and the mind merges in the object of meditation.

The process of meditation has several stages. Swami Vivekananda, commenting on the *Yoga Aphorisms* of Patanjali, explains:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The samadhi endowed with right knowledge is that which is attended by reasoning, discrimination, bliss, and unqualified ego.

Samadhi is divided into two kinds: one is called samprajnata, and the other, asamprajnata. In samprajnata samadhi come all the powers of controlling nature. It is of four varieties. The first variety is called savitarka, when the mind meditates upon an object again and again, by isolating it from other objects. There are two sorts of objects for meditation in the twenty-five categories of Samkhya: the twenty-four insentient categories of nature, and the one sentient Purusha. This part of Yoga is based entirely on Samkhya philosophy.... Ego and will and mind have a common basis, the chitta or mind-stuff, out of which they are all manufactured. This mind-stuff takes in the forces of nature and projects them as thought. There must be something, again, where both force and matter are one. This is called avyakta, the unmanifested state of nature before creation, to which, after the end of a cycle, the whole of nature returns, and from which it comes out again at the time of the next creation. Beyond that is the Purusha, the Essence of Intelligence.

Knowledge is power, and as soon as we begin to know a thing we get power over it; so also, when the mind begins to meditate on the different elements it gains power over them. That sort of meditation where the external gross elements are the objects is called savitarka. Vitarka means "question"; savitarka, "with question." This samadhi implies the questioning of the elements, as it were, that they may yield their powers to the man who meditates upon them. There is no liberation in getting powers. It is a search after worldly enjoyments, and there is no real enjoyment in this life. All search for enjoyment is vain; this is the old, old lesson which man finds so hard to learn. When he does learn it, he gets out of the universe and becomes free. The possession of what are called occult powers only intensifies worldliness, and, in the end, intensifies suffering. Though

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

as a scientist Patanjali is bound to point out the possibilities of his science, he never misses an opportunity to warn us against these powers.

Again, in the very same meditation, when one struggles to take the elements out of time and space, and thinks of them as they are, it is called nirvitarka samadhi, "samadhi without question." When the meditation goes a step higher and takes the tanmatras as its object, and thinks of them as within time and space, it is called savichara samadhi, "samadhi with discrimination"; and when in the same meditation one eliminates time and space and thinks of the fine elements as they are, it is called nirvichara samadhi, "samadhi without discrimination."

In the next step the elements, both gross and fine, are given up and the object of meditation is the interior organ, the thinking organ. When the thinking organ is thought of as bereft of the qualities of activity and dullness, then follows the sananda or blissful samadhi. When the mind itself, free from the impurity of rajas and tamas, is the object of meditation, when meditation becomes very ripe and concentrated, when all ideas of the gross and fine materials are given up, when only the sattva state of the ego remains, but differentiated from all other objects, it is called asmita samadhi. Even in this state one does not completely transcend the mind. The man who has attained it is called in the Vedas videha, or "bereft of body." He can think of himself as without his gross body; but he will have to think of himself as having a fine body. Those who in this state get merged in nature without attaining the goal are called prakritilinas; but those who do not stop even here reach the goal, which is freedom.

There is another samadhi, which is attained by constant practice of the cessation of all mental activity, and in which the chitta retains only the unmanifested impressions.

This is the perfect superconscious asamprajnata samadhi, the state which gives us freedom. The first state does not give us freedom, does not liberate the soul. A man may

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

attain all the powers and yet fall again. There is no safeguard until the soul goes beyond nature. It is very difficult to do so although the method seems easy. The method is to meditate on the mind itself, and whenever any thought comes, to strike it down, allowing no thought to come into the mind, thus making it an entire vacuum. When we can really do this, that very moment we shall attain liberation. When persons without training and preparation try to make their minds vacant, they are likely to succeed only in covering themselves with tamas, the material of ignorance, which makes the mind dull and stupid and leads them to think that they are making a vacuum of the mind. To be able to really do that is to manifest the greatest strength, the highest control.

When this state, asamprajnata, or superconsciousness, is reached, the samadhi becomes seedless. What is meant by that? In a concentration where there is consciousness, where the mind succeeds only in quelling the waves in the chitta and holding them down, the waves remain in the form of tendencies. These tendencies, or seeds, become waves again when the opportunity comes. But when you have destroyed all these tendencies, almost destroyed the mind, then the samadhi becomes seedless; there are no more seeds in the mind out of which to manufacture again and again this plant of life, this ceaseless round of birth and death.[3]

Distinctive Marks of the Yoga System

According to the system of Yoga there are a number of distinctive marks of meditation:

1. The system of Yoga seeks to transform the subconscious by conscious effort.
2. Yoga does not rely absolutely on reason to reach the state of concentration. Reason cannot establish its power over an unruly mind that is ingrained in its habits. Persuasion is helpless where tendencies are deep-seated and strike their roots even into the body chemistry. The Yoga system seeks

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

to control the higher by controlling the lower—to control the mind by controlling and regulating the breath and posture.

3. It urges conscious control of the subconscious.
4. Its object of meditation can be anything belonging to the world of matter.
5. The seeker in this system need not have any preconceived idea about Reality.
6. The Yoga system considers meditation on God an alternative method to reach the goal.
7. The Yoga system maintains that the mind is never controlled unless an attempt is made to control it, and it asserts that control of the mind is achieved through controlling physiological processes. The path of Yoga is suited to those in whom reason has not yet established its natural supremacy over the emotions and volitions.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

6. Meditation in Vedanta

Meditation, according to Vedanta, is a form of intense mental worship *(upasana)*. It is constant dwelling of the mind on a suitable object, approved by the sacred texts, which can generate a stream of similar thoughts, relevant to a theme, while shutting out all other thoughts of a contrary nature. Meditation eventually leads to the direct perception of the Ultimate Reality.

The Ultimate Reality is one all-pervading Pure Consciousness, designated by the sacred texts of Vedanta as Brahman, also called the Absolute. Brahman is the Reality of all realities. The relative world of name, form, and categories appears to us as real only because it reflects the light of the Absolute. Brahman shines in every heart as Atman, the Soul of every individual soul. Brahman is also known as the Great Self (Paramatman), which is the Self of all beings and things. The individual soul and the Supreme Soul are identical in essence. From the absolute point of view, Brahman alone exists. The world of phenomena is illusory, like a mirage in the desert. Brahman as Absolute is beyond all thought and word, time and space, qualities and attributes, names and forms, and all the categories of understanding and intellectual comprehension. Brahman is not the consciousness of anything but is Consciousness Itself, which gives consciousness to all other things.

This Nirguna Brahman—Brahman without qualities—manifests Itself in time and space as Saguna Brahman (Brahman with qualities). According to Its different functions, Saguna Brahman appears as the creator, the preserver, and the destroyer. In the view

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

of Vedanta, the different forms of the Personal God, worshipped by various religions under names such as Father in Heaven, Jehovah, Allah, Shiva, Vishnu, and Kali, are simply different manifestations of Saguna Brahman. They are different vistas of the Absolute from different angles. The various names of the Personal God are feeble attempts of the human mind to attribute name and form to that which is nameless and formless.

A sacred verse of Vedanta says that Brahman assumes many forms and attributes for the benefit of the seekers of truth. Another manifestation of Saguna Brahman is the Divine Incarnation, such as Rama, Krishna, Buddha, or Jesus. A third manifestation is the Inner Guide who dwells in the hearts of all living beings and controls their activities from within. The so-called individual soul is none other than Brahman Itself.

Individuality is a product of *maya*, the principle that creates ignorance or illusion. Under the spell of ignorance, an individual forgets his identity with the Absolute and becomes a victim of embodiment, identifying himself with the body and mind, believing himself to be man or woman and to belong to a certain caste, nation, race, and so forth. Though the innate nature of his true self is not affected by these notions, yet he regards these superimpositions as real, just as a mirage is regarded as real by a person wandering through the desert, even though the true nature of the desert remains unaffected. The goal of Vedanta is to awaken the individual from the hypnotic belief in his embodiment caused by forgetfulness of the Self. This forgetfulness creates friction and fear and sets in motion the unending cycle of birth and death, governed by the inexorable law of karma. This dehypnotization is possible only through Self-Knowledge, and in achieving this goal, concentration and meditation play the most vital role.

Ignorance is the root cause of embodiment and its various ramifications, and it can be dispelled only by knowledge and not by any form of action. Darkness is dispelled only by light. Emphasizing the need of this knowledge, Shankaracharya says:

> Let people quote the scriptures and sacrifice to the gods, let them perform rituals and worship the deities, but there is no liberation without the realization of one's identity with

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the Atman, no, not even in the lifetime of a hundred Brahmas* put together.[1]

Neither by Yoga, nor by Sankhya, nor by work, nor by learning, but the realization of one's identity with Brahman is liberation possible, and by no other means.[2]

Self-Knowledge is not a product of concentration and meditation, which are only means of purification. In the mirror of the pure mind, the truth of the one Self is revealed. As a hailstone falling into the ocean dissolves into the ocean, as a drop of pure water becomes one with the ocean of pure water, in the same way, the individual soul becomes one with the Supreme Soul.

The seeker of Self-Knowledge must be established in the practice of the fourfold discipline, by which he or she becomes fit for the practice of meditation:

1. *Discrimination between the real and unreal* results in a firm conviction that Brahman alone is real and all else is illusory. Discrimination is a process of radical reflection on the goals and priorities of life. It goes beyond the obvious and the apparent, and recognizes that what appears to be true is not true in fact.
2. *Dispassion* means giving up all desires, whether for this world or the next. It brings a constant perception of the harmful effects in all sense enjoyments, seen or heard, here or hereafter, and a crying halt to compulsive and habitual ways of life.
3. *Mastery over six vitrues.* The six virtues are (a) control of mind, (b) control of the senses, (c) withdrawal of mind from sense objects, (d) fortitude, (e) faith in the words of the spiritual teacher and the scriptures, and (f) concentration of the mind on Brahman. The essence of the six virtues is self-control, without which the quest for Self-Knowledge is an empty dream. It involves observance of chastity in thought,

*The lifetime of a hundred Brahmas" means an almost infinite length of time. The reference here is to the creator deity Brahma, who is an aspect of Saguna Brahman.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

word, and deed, and withstanding the impact of lust and greed. Fortitude is cheerfully bearing, with evenness of mind, all the frustrations of life that are inevitable and unavoidable. Faith leads the way to victory. It is the implicit conviction that one will succeed in the spiritual goal.

4. *Intense longing for liberation* from all bondage. Longing is the restlessness of the soul. Until the soul feels restless, no amount of study, prayer, concentration, or meditation is of any avail. It is the intensity of the longing that determines the achievement of the goal.

The practice of the fourfold discipline endows the seeker with a steel-frame moral foundation to wrestle with the unruly mind and its wild impulses and urges. Sri Krishna says in the *Uddhava Gita:*

> Charity, the performance of one's duty, the observance of vows, general and particular, the hearing of the scriptures, meritorious acts, and all other works—all these culminate in the control of the mind. The control of the mind is the highest Yoga. Say of what use are charity and the rest to one whose mind is controlled and pacified? Of what use, again, are this charity and the rest to one whose mind is restless or lapsing into dullness?[3]

The roadblocks to Self-Knowledge are generally known to be four kinds of defects:

1. Defects of the body, such as disease
2. Defects of the sense organs—that is, their outgoing, restless tendency
3. Defects of the mind: doubt, fluctuation, and indecision
4. Defects of the intellect: lack of concentration

The first kind of defect is removed through selfless actions—that is, actions done without a sense of being the doer or claiming the fruits; the second kind by means of regulated self-control and withdrawal of the mind from sense objects; the third kind by means of reflection or self-analysis; and the fourth kind by means of meditation and absorption.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The Vedantic practices for meditation are divided into two groups: foundational and structural. The four disciplines are foundational, and the three steps of meditation are structural. Success in structural practices is proportional to success in foundational practices. One who aspires to greater heights must first build a strong and deep foundation. Thus, being firmly established in the fourfold discipline, the seeker acquires the fitness to meditate.

The three steps in meditation are hearing, reflecting, and meditating. Hearing is listening to the instruction of a qualified teacher who uses the scriptures to explain the oneness of the individual self and Brahman. Reflecting is thinking constantly about Brahman as taught in this way, thus strengthening one's conviction regarding Its reality by means of positive reasoning. Meditating is constantly dwelling on a stream of ideas reminiscent of the nondual, all-pervading Brahman, to the exclusion of all other ideas and thoughts, such as body, mind, senses, and ego. Meditation practiced without interruption for a long time, with intense love for the Chosen Ideal, and with unflagging determination for Its realization, culminates in *samadhi.*

Depending upon the intensity and the nature of the concentration, *samadhi* has been described as having two stages, *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa.*

> In the *savikalpa samadhi,* the mental state *(vritti)* takes the form of Brahman and rests on It but at the same time retains the distinctions of knower, knowledge, and object of knowledge. The aspirant may still be aware of the relative, though he clearly sees it to be permeated by the Absolute. It is like seeing a clay elephant and also the clay that permeates the elephant. The aspirant still retains I-consciousness, and he says, "I am Brahman, Intelligence Absolute, formless as the ether, supreme, eternally luminous, birthless, immutable, unattached, all-pervading, ever-free, and the One without a second."
>
> But in the *nirvikalpa samadhi,* absorption bereft of I-consciousness, the mind totally merges in Brahman, becomes one with It, and loses all distinction of knower, knowledge, and object of knowledge. Just as a lump of salt,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

when dissolved in water, is no longer perceived to be distinct from the water and cannot be separated from the water, so, likewise, the mental state, in the *nirvikalpa samadhi*, taking the form of Brahman, is no longer perceived to be distinct from Brahman and cannot be separated from Brahman; it has no existence apart from Brahman. Then Brahman, or the Self, alone exists and shines by Its own radiance.[4]

Direct and Indirect Paths

For Vedanta, meditation has a special meaning, described as *nidi-dhyasana*, a state of Self-awareness in which there is neither exertion of will nor conscious effort for concentration. It is not a continuous flow of thought, but the constant flow of conviction that "I am Brahman" *(Aham Brahmasmi)*. This conviction, though greatly illuminating, still falls short of the direct perception of the Self that is attained in *samadhi*. The practice of meditation is for those who have not yet reached this stage of conviction.

Vedanta maintains that Self-Knowledge is not the result of any meditation. Knowledge is revelation, whereas meditation is an action. It is a mental process that aims at knowledge of an object through identification. Knowledge is determined by the object, but meditation is dependent on the subject. In meditation, one must have faith in both the object of meditation and the process of meditation. But knowledge does not presuppose any such faith. Meditation can only purify the mind, and truth is revealed in the mirror of the pure mind. An impure mind, when roused through concentration and meditation, proves self-destructive. A Sanskrit proverb says: "To feed a cobra with milk without first removing its poison fangs only increases its venom."

The threefold practice of hearing, reflecting, and meditating is a direct path to Self-Knowledge. Meditation in this path has no intermediate means of support, such as forms, symbols, or images. This path is reserved for those spiritual aspirants who are the most qualified and who are fully established in the practice of the four-fold discipline discussed earlier. Meditation in this path is more a process of knowledge and right apprehension of Reality rather than a focusing of the mind on some definite object. Right apprehension

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

depends more on the knower's mind, while meditation depends on the nature of the thing known. Meditation depends upon the directions of the scripture and the teacher, and the seeker's faith and determined effort, but right apprehension depends on its means and the Ideal. In meditation there is the play of imagination; in right apprehension only cognition. Right apprehension is determined by facts; meditation is dependent on the seeker's mind. Right apprehension is knowledge and meditation combined, which annuls the distinction between the knower and the known.

Meditation is an indirect approach to the Ultimate. It is for those who find the direct approach difficult. In the view of Vedanta, meditation practice is directed toward Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with name, form, and attributes superimposed upon It. For the average seeker this is a convenient halfway house in which to rest for some time before putting forth fresh effort to reach the final goal. Saguna Brahman serves as a bridge between the finite mind and the infinite, all-pervading Pure Consciousness. Success in meditation on Saguna Brahman qualifies the seeker for the right apprehension of Nirguna Brahman. The various meditative exercises known as *vidyas*, given in the Upanishads, are examples of meditation on Saguna Brahman. A seeker may choose any one that appeals the most.

We have said that Vedanta regards meditation as intense mental worship. Shankaracharya, in his commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, describes this worship as mentally approaching the form of the deity as it is presented in the ritualistic portion of the Vedas, and concentrating on it, excluding all worldly objects, until one is completely identified with it as with one's body, conventionally regarded as one's self.[5]

Vedanta prescribes for the seeker a graded form of worship. First comes worship through symbols and images. The average person, whose powers of concentration are weak, is advised to concentrate on some form of the Divine approved by the scriptures, which can generate a flow of similar thoughts relevant to the theme of his concentration. The symbol or image may be visual. As the seeker advances, he is advised to concentrate on an audible symbol, which is the second stage of worship. An audible symbol can be a sacred word, a mystical syllable, or a great saying from the scriptures. Meditation is the third form of worship, in which the seeker

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

dwells on the many qualities of the Divine or on a specific manifestation of It. The image or form of the Divine should be looked upon as a focus of the all-pervading Pure Consciousness. The fourth stage of worship is meditating on one's inner self as identical with the all-pervading Universal Self. The seeker meditates on the saying "I am He." Those who are incapable of this highest form of worship—that is, unable to worship the nameless, formless Brahman, or Pure Consciousness—are advised to think "I am His" instead of "I am He."

So worship of the Divine through symbols and images is the first stage. Higher than that is repetition of a sacred word and a prayer. Still higher is meditation, and the highest form of worship is maintaining constant awareness of the fact "I am He."

These four stages might also be characterized in terms of three levels of worship: dualistic, qualified nondualistic, and nondualistic. At the dualistic stage, the seeker feels that God is separate from himself; at the qualified nondualistic stage, he thinks of God as a whole and himself as a part of that whole; and at the nondualistic stage, he feels that God and himself are one.

Often these three stages follow one another: first, fixing the mind on a divine form; second, fixing the mind no longer on the divine form but on the auspicious qualities that the form represents; and third, fixing the mind only on the real nature of the form, that is, on the form as the Self. The *Vishnu Purana* illustrates this point:

> Meditate on Vishnu, the Dweller in the hearts of all beings, seated on a lotus within the rays of the sun, his body luminous, adorned with diadem, necklace, earrings, and bracelets of great luster, and holding conch shell and mace in his hands. Then the wise man should meditate upon the luminous, benign form of the Lord, without the conch shell and mace, but adorned with ornaments. As the mind becomes concentrated on the form, he must then keep his mind on the form without ornaments. Then he must meditate upon his oneness with the luminous form of the Lord. Lastly, he must let the form vanish and meditate upon the Atman.[6]

Although meditation on a specific aspect of Saguna Brahman is indirect knowledge and not direct knowledge of the Self, yet

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Vedanta contends that indirect knowledge is in no way opposed to direct knowledge. The *Panchadasi* says:

> After first acquiring an indirect knowledge of the real nature of Brahman, described in the Vedanta as partless and secondless Consciousness, one should meditate on "I am that Brahman." If instead of realizing Brahman directly as one's inner self, one knows in a general way from a study of *shastras* [authoritative scriptures] that there is Brahman, just as one may form a conception of the form of Vishnu, it is said to be indirect knowledge. Though one may know from the scriptures that Vishnu has four arms, etc., still, as long as one has not directly seen Vishnu with one's own eyes, one's knowledge of Vishnu is only indirect. There is thus no direct knowledge of Vishnu.... A direct knowledge of stone is in no way opposed to an indirect knowledge of God, whose image is made of stone. When the idea of Vishnu is well established in a stone image, the direct perception of stone does not destroy the idea of Vishnu in the mind of anybody.[7]

Such worship of Saguna Brahman, in which the Ultimate Reality is thought of as having form and attributes, is termed dualistic meditation. It is a concession to the weakness of those who are incapable of nondualistic meditation on the nameless, formless, and attributeless Nirguna Brahman. Nonetheless, Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman are not two different Brahmans. They are only two different forms of Brahman: Brahman as It is Itself and Brahman as It is in relation to the universe.

Nondualistic Meditation

In nondualistic meditation, the seeker meditates on Brahman as all-pervading Pure Consciousness, One without a second, infinite and eternal, which fills all the directions. He meditates on the complete identity of his inmost Self and Brahman, the Supreme Self. As he meditates on this identity, there arises in his mind a modification, colored by Brahman, that makes him feel that he is Brahman—eternal, infinite, and supremely blissful. This mental state, illumined by the reflection of Pure Consciousness, destroys all ignorance and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

dwells on the many qualities of the Divine or on a specific manifestation of It. The image or form of the Divine should be looked upon as a focus of the all-pervading Pure Consciousness. The fourth stage of worship is meditating on one's inner self as identical with the all-pervading Universal Self. The seeker meditates on the saying "I am He." Those who are incapable of this highest form of worship—that is, unable to worship the nameless, formless Brahman, or Pure Consciousness—are advised to think "I am His" instead of "I am He."

So worship of the Divine through symbols and images is the first stage. Higher than that is repetition of a sacred word and a prayer. Still higher is meditation, and the highest form of worship is maintaining constant awareness of the fact "I am He."

These four stages might also be characterized in terms of three levels of worship: dualistic, qualified nondualistic, and nondualistic. At the dualistic stage, the seeker feels that God is separate from himself; at the qualified nondualistic stage, he thinks of God as a whole and himself as a part of that whole; and at the nondualistic stage, he feels that God and himself are one.

Often these three stages follow one another: first, fixing the mind on a divine form; second, fixing the mind no longer on the divine form but on the auspicious qualities that the form represents; and third, fixing the mind only on the real nature of the form, that is, on the form as the Self. The *Vishnu Purana* illustrates this point:

> Meditate on Vishnu, the Dweller in the hearts of all beings, seated on a lotus within the rays of the sun, his body luminous, adorned with diadem, necklace, earrings, and bracelets of great luster, and holding conch shell and mace in his hands. Then the wise man should meditate upon the luminous, benign form of the Lord, without the conch shell and mace, but adorned with ornaments. As the mind becomes concentrated on the form, he must then keep his mind on the form without ornaments. Then he must meditate upon his oneness with the luminous form of the Lord. Lastly, he must let the form vanish and meditate upon the Atman.[6]

Although meditation on a specific aspect of Saguna Brahman is indirect knowledge and not direct knowledge of the Self, yet

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Vedanta contends that indirect knowledge is in no way opposed to direct knowledge. The *Panchadasi* says:

> After first acquiring an indirect knowledge of the real nature of Brahman, described in the Vedanta as partless and secondless Consciousness, one should meditate on "I am that Brahman." If instead of realizing Brahman directly as one's inner self, one knows in a general way from a study of *shastras* [authoritative scriptures] that there is Brahman, just as one may form a conception of the form of Vishnu, it is said to be indirect knowledge. Though one may know from the scriptures that Vishnu has four arms, etc., still, as long as one has not directly seen Vishnu with one's own eyes, one's knowledge of Vishnu is only indirect. There is thus no direct knowledge of Vishnu.... A direct knowledge of stone is in no way opposed to an indirect knowledge of God, whose image is made of stone. When the idea of Vishnu is well established in a stone image, the direct perception of stone does not destroy the idea of Vishnu in the mind of anybody.[7]

Such worship of Saguna Brahman, in which the Ultimate Reality is thought of as having form and attributes, is termed dualistic meditation. It is a concession to the weakness of those who are incapable of nondualistic meditation on the nameless, formless, and attributeless Nirguna Brahman. Nonetheless, Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman are not two different Brahmans. They are only two different forms of Brahman: Brahman as It is Itself and Brahman as It is in relation to the universe.

Nondualistic Meditation

In nondualistic meditation, the seeker meditates on Brahman as all-pervading Pure Consciousness, One without a second, infinite and eternal, which fills all the directions. He meditates on the complete identity of his inmost Self and Brahman, the Supreme Self. As he meditates on this identity, there arises in his mind a modification, colored by Brahman, that makes him feel that he is Brahman—eternal, infinite, and supremely blissful. This mental state, illumined by the reflection of Pure Consciousness, destroys all ignorance and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

doubts regarding the absolute reality of Brahman. Yet this mental state cannot be taken as knowledge of Brahman, for it is only a modification of mind.

When a cause is destroyed, all its effects are also automatically destroyed. Thus, when ignorance is destroyed, the various mental states, which are the effects of ignorance, are also destroyed. The mental state colored by Brahman, being part of the effects, is thus destroyed. Upon the destruction of the mental states, the individual self—which is but a reflection of the Supreme Self, Brahman—returns to It, just as the image of a face in a mirror returns to the face itself when the mirror is broken or removed. The subject and the object—the absolute Pure Consciousness and the seeker's perceiving consciousness—become merged.

Nondualistic meditation is often associated with the repetition of a Vedic sacred word. As the seeker repeats the sacred word, he first concentrates on the Self as his inmost being. Thereafter he thinks of the Self within as the witness consciousness, distinct and separate from his body, mind, and all other things. Then he meditates on the Self as Brahman, the immutable and all-pervading Pure Consciousness. Shankaracharya describes the nature of direct meditation:

> That Supreme Brahman, which is beyond the range of all speech, but accessible to the eye of pure illumination; which is pure, the embodiment of Knowledge, the beginningless entity—that Brahman art thou, meditate on this in thy mind....
>
> That Reality which (though One) appears variously owing to delusion, taking on names and forms, attributes and changes, Itself always unchanged, like gold in its modifications—that Brahman art thou, meditate on this in thy mind.
>
> That beyond which there is nothing; which shines even above *maya,* which again is superior to its effect, the universe; the inmost Self of all, free from differentiation; the Real Self, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute; infinite and immutable—that Brahman art thou, meditate on this in thy mind.[8]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The *Mundaka Upanishad* says:

> Take the Upanishad as the bow, the great weapon, and place upon it the arrow [the individual soul] sharpened by meditation. Then, having drawn it back with a mind directed to the thought of Brahman, strike that mark, O my good friend—that which is the Imperishable. *Om* is the bow; the *atman* [the individual self] is the arrow; Brahman is said to be the mark. It is to be struck with an undistracted mind. Then the *atman* becomes one with Brahman, as the arrow with the target.[9]

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* gives the image of making fire by rubbing two sticks of wood together:

> By making the body the lower piece of wood, and *Om* the upper piece, and through the practice of the friction of meditation, one perceives the luminous Self, hidden like the fire in the wood.[10]

Again, in nondualistic meditation on the formless and attributeless Self, the seeker may imagine being a fish swimming freely and blissfully in the undivided and eternally indivisible ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, or a bird flying in the infinite sky. One may imagine oneself as a pot immersed in water—water inside and outside, water above and below—or as a point of light in the immeasurable ocean of light. In any meditation, the seeker needs something on which to fix the mind. The ideas associated with the ocean of light, the infinite sky, and so on, serve as supports for concentration.

In nondualistic meditation, the seeker dwells on the identity of his inmost Self with the all-pervading Self of the universe and may adopt any of the following means to meditate on this identity: negation, discrimination, detachment, merging, and concentration.

Negation

Negation is a process of self-analysis by which the seeker gives up his identity with all that is non-Self. Shankaracharya's "Six Stanzas on Nirvana" beautifully describes this process of self-analysis:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Om. I am neither the mind, intelligence, ego, nor *chitta* [seat of memory], neither the ears nor the tongue, nor the senses of smell and sight; neither ether nor air, nor fire nor water nor earth: I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness—I am Siva! I am Siva!

I am neither the *prana* [the vital force that sustains life in a physical body] nor the five vital breaths [various functions of the *prana*], neither the seven elements of the body [water, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and semen], nor its five sheaths [the sheaths of food, *prana*, mind, intelligence, and bliss, which conceal Atman, or the Self, as a scabbard conceals a sword], nor hands nor feet nor tongue, nor other organ of action: I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness—I am Siva! I am Siva!

Neither greed nor delusion, loathing nor liking, have I; nothing of pride or ego, of *dharma* or Liberation; neither desire of the mind nor object for its desiring: I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness—I am Siva! I am Siva!

Nothing of pleasure and pain, of virtue and vice, do I know, of mantra or sacred place, of Vedas or sacrifice; neither am I the eater, the food, nor the act of eating: I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness—I am Siva! I am Siva![11]

The negation process has two movements. In the first, the seeker reaches his inmost Self by the process of elimination, expressed in the phrase *neti, neti* ("Not this, not this"), and seeks to realize the identity of his own self with Brahman, the all-pervading Self. In the second movement, as he returns to outer consciousness, he tries to see the indwelling presence of Brahman manifested in everything that he previously negated as non-Self.

Discrimination

The second means of nondualistic meditation is discrimination. According to Vedanta, every object has two aspects—essential and existential. The eternal indwelling spirit constitutes the essential aspect, while the existential aspect is made of "name and form." The existential aspect varies from object to object, but the essential

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

aspect, the spirit, remains constant. In meditation, one concentrates on the essential aspect of the object of meditation by separating it from the existential aspect.

Detachment

The meditator seeks to experience his inmost Self as a witness who observes without attachment the rise and fall of the thought-waves of his mind and the functioning of his sense organs. A verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* clearly expresses the spirit of this detachment:

> "I do nothing at all," thinks the yogi, the knower of Truth; for in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting; in walking, breathing, and sleeping; in speaking, emitting, and seizing; in opening and closing the eyes, he is assured that it is only the senses busied with their objects.[12]

Merging

The *Katha Upanishad* describes the process of merging:

> The Self hidden in all beings does not shine forth; but It is seen by subtle seers through their one-pointed and subtle intellect. The wise man should merge his speech in his mind, and his mind in his intellect. He should merge his intellect in the Cosmic Mind, and the Cosmic Mind in the Tranquil Self.[13]

The seeker may also imagine that the earth is merging in water, then water in fire, fire in air, air in ether, ether in the Unmanifest, and finally, the Unmanifest in all-pervading Pure Consciousness. Or he may imagine that the wakeful is merging in dream, dream in dreamless sleep, and dreamless sleep in the *Turiya*, the inmost Self, Pure Consciousness, the Ground of everything.

Concentration

By means of concentration, the seeker meditates on the meaning of some Vedic saying indicating the Supreme Self. Such concentration culminates in absorption in It. Meditation on Om or on other sacred words belongs to this process.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Objective and Subjective Meditation

According to another tradition of nondualistic Vedanta, meditation may be objective or subjective. In objective meditation, the object or ideal is thought to be outside the body. Objective meditation may be associated with, or conditioned by, a sound symbol or a form symbol. In objective meditation associated with a sound symbol, the seeker repeats a sacred word indicative of the all-pervading nature of Brahman. As he repeats the sacred word, he meditates on its meaning. In objective meditation associated with a form symbol, the seeker meditates on some external form or object signifying Infinite Brahman. He first concentrates on a form symbol and then gradually takes his mind away from the form of the symbol and concentrates it on Brahman, which the symbol represents. He tries to see Brahman through the symbol as one sees the ocean in and through the waves or the forest in and through the trees. Objective meditation has two states of absorption, as mentioned earlier: *savikalpa samadhi* and *nirvikalpa samadhi*. In the *savikalpa* state, the seeker remains conscious of the object of meditation, while in the *nirvikalpa* state, he becomes one with it.

In subjective meditation, according to Advaita Vedanta, the ideal or form is placed within the meditator, usually in the region of the heart. The beginner thinks of the heart as a physical organ shaped like a lotus bud. Inside this bud is a luminous space described by the Vedanta texts as the abode of Brahman. As the seeker progresses in meditation, he begins to feel that his heart is not just a physical organ but a part of his mind where the reflection of Brahman is perceived. At this stage, meditation is raised from the physical level to the mental level. Then the seeker casts Brahman in the mold of his mind, forming a mental image of It. At the final stage, this image in his heart becomes one with Brahman, the all-pervading Pure Consciousness.

As in the objective meditation, so in the subjective meditation, the ideal may be associated with, or conditioned by, a sound or form symbol. When it is associated with a sound symbol, the seeker repeats a sacred word indicative of Brahman. While repeating the sacred word, he meditates on its meaning, concentrating on the sound of the repetition. The sound gradually becomes dissolved into silence. In subjective meditation associated with a form symbol, the seeker

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

observes as a witness the various thought-waves that arise in his mind, and his mind gradually becomes absorbed in its role as witness.

The subjective meditation also has its *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa* states. In the *savikalpa* state the seeker feels that he is unattached Brahman. In the *nirvikalpa* state he becomes totally absorbed in the Self, and his perception of subject and object vanishes altogether. Self-Knowledge now shines in its fullest light. The seeker who has attained this state becomes a true knower of Brahman, and knowing Brahman, he becomes Brahman Itself. He sees Brahman both with eyes open and with eyes closed.

Dualistic Meditation

Meditation on Saguna Brahman's dualistic nature is practiced by means of a symbol, which can be an image or a name. For example, the seeker is advised to meditate on a particular manifestation of Saguna Brahman as Shiva, Vishnu, or Shakti as the Chosen Ideal or on any of the Divine Incarnations.

Meditation on a symbol is of two kinds. In the first kind of meditation (based on "similarity"), the mind thinks not of the symbol itself but of what the symbol represents. In the second kind of meditation, the symbol itself predominates, and onto it is superimposed the qualities of the Deity. This kind of meditation is referred to in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* in such phrases as: "Meditate on the mind as Brahman"[14] and "The sun is Brahman, this is the instruction."[15]

Meditation, whether nondualistic or dualistic, is meant for those who are incapable of fixing their mind on the formless and attributeless Reality. Of the two kinds of meditation, the nondualistic variety with the help of a sound symbol such as the sacred word Om or a great saying of the Upanishads is considered superior to the dualistic variety. The superiority of nondualistic meditation over dualistic is based on the fact that the former is more direct than the latter.

The concern of Vedanta is to lead the seeker step by step to the summit of Self-Knowledge. All suffering is due to ignorance, because ignorance blocks the vision of Reality and causes embodiment, and the fabric of all embodiment is attachment to names and forms. In order to free the soul from its attachment to name and form, Vedanta seeks to substitute holy forms for worldly forms, holy personalities

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

for worldly personalities, holy names for worldly names. Vedanta teaches the reality of Brahman and the illusoriness of the sense-perceived world. Yet, for the average person, the world is real and so are its pairs of opposites, such as birth and death, good and evil. As long as one regards himself as a psychophysical being, conscious of his body, mind, and ego, he is not fully aware of himself as inner spirit. It is impossible for such a person to meditate directly on Brahman. For him the approach to the Supreme Brahman is through a Personal God, Saguna Brahman. The Personal God is conceived as having many different forms. The various forms of deities and divinities in Vedanta are regarded as different facets of one and the same Personal God. It is but one step from the realization of a Personal God to the knowledge of Nirguna Brahman, the formless, attributeless Absolute.

Theoretically speaking, the seeker could select anything in this universe as the manifestation of Supreme Brahman and thus as an object on which to meditate. But the tradition of Vedanta categorizes certain specific objects as special manifestations of Brahman. In chapter 10 of the *Bhagavad Gita,* Arjuna asks Sri Krishna: "In what various things, O Lord, are you to be contemplated by me?"[16] In reply, Sri Krishna enumerates the diverse objects in manifold categories in which He is especially manifest (and concludes by adding that He supports the entire universe by just a fraction of Himself).[17] These are considered preferred objects of meditation. The object selected for meditation is to be looked upon as a focus of the infinite and all-pervading Brahman. It is like a window through which a limited portion of the infinite sky is visible.

In all meditation, both subject and object gradually dissolve into Brahman. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says: "He who meditates upon a deity as distinct from himself is not enlightened and is as ignorant as a cow."[18] Sri Krishna says in the *Mahabharata:* "Whoever, O Arjuna, wishing to praise Me by reciting My thousand names, knows himself to be identical with Me, his praise I accept, even if he recites one verse."[19]

Symbols and Images

Symbols through which the Personal God is worshipped are generally of two types: geometric and anthropomorphic. Geometric symbols

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

are signs and diagrams, while anthropomorphic symbols are human symbols. Human symbols take the form of paintings or statues representing divine personalities such as saints and prophets or incarnations of God. Symbols are finite representations of the infinite. They are attempts to name the nameless and attribute forms to the formless, all-pervading Reality. They serve as supports for concentration of mind. By concentrating on a symbol, one finally transcends the symbol and becomes one with the all-pervading Reality, which is beyond all names and forms. A well-known Vedantic verse expresses the spirit of worship through symbols:

> O Lord, in my worship I have attributed forms to Thee, who art formless. O Thou teacher of the world, by my hymns I have, as it were, contradicted Thy indescribable nature. By going on pilgrimage I have, as it were, denied Thy omnipresence. O Lord of the universe, pray, forgive me these three transgressions.[20]

Regarding the use of symbols and images in meditation, Swami Vivekananda says:

> All of you have been taught to believe in an omnipresent God. Try to think of it. How few of you can have any idea of what omnipresence means! If you struggle hard, you will get something like the idea of the ocean, or of the sky, or of a vast stretch of green earth, or of a desert. All these are material images, and so long as you cannot conceive of the abstract *as* abstract, or the ideal *as* the ideal, you will have to resort to these forms, these material images. It does not make much difference whether these images are inside or outside the mind. We are all born idolaters, and idolatry is good, because it is in the nature of man. Who can get beyond it? Only the perfect man, the God-man. The rest of us are idolaters. So long as we see the universe before us, with its forms and shapes, we are all idolaters. This is a gigantic symbol we are worshipping. He who says that he is the body is a born idolater....
>
> It is very easy to say "Don't be personal," but the same man who says it is generally most personal. His attachment

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

for particular men and women is very strong; it does not leave him when they die—he wants to follow them beyond death. That is idolatry. It is the seed, the very cause of idolatry; and the cause being there, it will come out in some form. Is it not better to have a personal attachment to an image of Christ or Buddha than to an ordinary man or woman? We may worship anything by seeing God in it, if we can forget the idol and see God there. We must not project any image upon God. But we may fill any image with that Life, which is God. Only forget the image, and you are right enough—for "out of Him comes everything." He is everything. We may worship a picture as God, but not God as the picture. God in the picture is right, but the picture as God is wrong. God in the image is perfectly right. There is no danger there. This is the real worship of God.[21]

The Hindus have discovered that the Absolute can only be realized, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and that the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols, so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for everyone; but those that do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism.[22]

Thus all worship is undertaken with the basic assumption that behind all forms, names, and symbols there shines the Supreme Light, which is without forms and attributes. Self-Knowledge is like the roof of a building, and the graded stages of worship (dualistic, qualified nondualistic, and nondualistic) are steps leading to that roof. One can reach the roof only by climbing the steps. One can realize the Formless only by transcending forms, not by bypassing them. One who is not able to concentrate on forms will never be able to concentrate on the Formless. Swami Brahmananda, one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, gives the illustration of a man standing in the courtyard of a house. He wants to reach the roof. But if, instead of climbing the staircase step by step, he permits himself to be thrown up bodily, he will cause serious injury to himself.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Distinctive Marks of Meditation According to Vedanta

The distinctive marks of meditation according to the Vedanta system are the following:

1. The goal of meditation according to the Vedanta system is the union of the individual consciousness *(jivatman)* with the all-pervading Pure Consciousness (Paramatman).
2. Meditation in Vedanta is worship *(upasana)* in silence. It is the worship of God as one's own self. *Upasana*, according to Shankaracharya, is mentally approaching any form of the divine as an object of meditation and concentration. Thus the object of meditation should not be something fanciful or imaginary.
3. In Vedantic meditation the mind is brought to concentration by persuasion and reasoning. The lower is controlled with the help of the higher—emotions by the intellect, body by the mind.
4. Vedantic meditation passes from the conception of Brahman as object to Its conception as subject, and then from the idea of subject to the conception of Pure Consciousness.

Points of Difference between Yoga and Vedanta

The *samadhi* state attained in the Yoga system, even in its highest form, is withdrawal of the Self from all that is not-Self. The universe continues to remain as a real not-Self, from which the Self withdraws, but which the Self cannot resolve into itself. In the *nirvikalpa* vision of Vedanta, the not-Self is resolved into the Self. Self-Realization of the Yoga system is an intense realization and depends upon a process. The goal of meditation, according to Vedanta, is not anything produced or generated; it is a revelation comparable to a feeling of limitless expansion.

The view of Reality in the Vedanta and Yoga systems is not the same. According to Vedanta, the Ultimate Reality is One without a second, while in Yoga philosophy the Ultimate Realities are two:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Purusha, or the Indwelling Self, and Prakriti, the world of matter. Vedanta is nondualistic, while the Yoga system is dualistic. Self-Realization, the goal of the Yoga system, is separation of the Self from the not-Self, which is the world of matter that continues to exist in some form or other, being real in itself. Yogic Self-Realization is freedom of the Purusha in its aloneness. It has a negative connotation: it is freedom *from* the not-Self. The Self-Knowledge of Vedanta is freedom *in* everything. It is positive in nature. It is not only the cessation of all suffering forever but also the attainment of absolute bliss.

According to the Yoga system, the liberated soul is omnipresent. It is pure and simple, but not the sole Reality, because, according to the Yoga system, souls are innumerable.

The *nirvikalpa samadhi* of Vedanta and the *asamprajnata samadhi* of the Yoga system are not the same. In meditation according to Vedanta, the seeker does not dissociate the Self from the mind: he concentrates his mind on the inmost Self and meditates on It as Brahman. Through intense meditation the mind develops a mental mode reminiscent of Infinite Brahman. The not-Self is dissolved in Brahman.

Both the Yoga and Vedanta systems stress the practice of meditation as the sole means of attaining Self-Realization. Vedanta accepts the eightfold practice of the Yoga system, but differs from the Yoga system in its philosophical views. Vedanta gives a positive interpretation of the eight limbs of Yoga, which will be discussed later.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

7. The Sacred Texts on Meditation

The Upanishads

That Self hidden in all beings does not shine forth; but It is seen by subtle seers through their one-pointed and subtle intellects.

—*Katha Upanishad* 1.3.12

The wise man who, by means of concentration on the Self, realizes that ancient, effulgent One, who is hard to be seen, unmanifest, hidden, and who dwells in the *buddhi* and rests in the body—he, indeed, leaves joy and sorrow far behind.

—*Katha Upanishad* 1.2.12

The wise man should hold his body steady, with the three [upper] parts erect, turn his senses, with the help of the mind, toward the heart, and by means of the raft of Brahman cross the fearful torrents of the world.

—*Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.8

Let yoga be practiced within a cave protected from the high wind, or in a place which is level, pure, and free from pebbles, gravel, and fire, undisturbed by the noise of water or of market-booths, and which is delightful to the mind and not offensive to the eye.

—*Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.10

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

That Brahman shines forth, vast, self-luminous, inconceivable, subtler than the subtle. He is far beyond what is far, and yet here very near at hand. Verily, He is seen here, dwelling in the cave of the heart of conscious beings.

—*MUNDAKA UPANISHAD* 3.1.7

Whosoever in this world, O Gargi, without knowing this Imperishable, offers oblations, performs sacrifices, and practices austerities, even for many thousands of years, finds all such acts but perishable. Whosoever, O Gargi, departs from this world without knowing this Imperishable is miserable. But he, O Gargi, who departs from this world after knowing the Imperishable is a knower of Brahman.

—*BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD* 3.8.10

All this is Brahman. From It the universe comes forth, in It the universe merges, and in It the universe breathes. Therefore a man should meditate on Brahman with a calm mind.

—*CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD* 3.14.1

Though a man may perform penance standing on one leg for a thousand years, it will not, in the least, be equal to one-sixteenth part of concentrated meditation.

—*PINGALA UPANISHAD* 4.15

Bhagavad Gita

A yogi should always try to concentrate his mind, retiring into solitude and living alone, having subdued his mind and body and got rid of his desires and possessions. In a clean spot, having fixed his seat—a firm seat, neither too high nor too low—and having spread over it kusa-grass, and then a deer skin, and then a cloth, and sitting there, he should practice yoga for the purification of the self, restraining the activities of his mind and senses, and bringing his thoughts to a point. He should sit firm, holding his body, neck, and head erect and still, and gaze steadily at the tip of his nose, without looking around.

(6.10–13)

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Patanjali

Dharana is the holding of the mind to some particular object. [When the mind holds on to some object, either in the body or outside the body, and keeps itself in that state, it has attained *dharana*, concentration.] An unbroken flow of knowledge about that object is *dhyana*. [When the mind tries to think of one object, to hold itself to one particular spot, such as the top of the head, or the heart, and succeeds in receiving sensations only through that part of the body, and no other part, it has attained *dharana;* and when the mind succeeds in keeping itself in that state for some time, it has attained *dhyana*, meditation.]

—*YOGA APHORISMS* 3.1–2

Shankaracharya

Meditate on the Atman, which resides in thee, which is devoid of all limiting adjuncts, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, the One without a second, and thou shalt no more come under the round of births and deaths.

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, vv. 288, 412

Sri Ramakrishna

In deep meditation the sense-organs stop functioning; the mind does not look outward. It is like closing the outer court in a house. There are five objects of the senses: form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. They are all left outside.[1]

Do you know what one feels in meditation? The mind becomes like a continuous flow of oil—it thinks of one object only, and that is God. It does not think of anything else.[2]

If you meditate on an ideal you will acquire its nature. If you think of God day and night, you will acquire the nature of God. A salt doll went into the ocean to measure its depth. It became one with the ocean.[3]

The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities;

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix the mind on God is very difficult, in the beginning, unless one practices meditation in solitude.[4]

To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest. And you should always discriminate between the Real and the unreal. God alone is real, the Eternal Substance; all else is unreal, that is, impermanent. By discriminating thus, one should shake off impermanent objects from the mind.[5]

A person can achieve such single-mindedness in meditation that he will see nothing, hear nothing. He will not be conscious even of touch. A snake may crawl over his body, but he will not know it. Neither of them will be aware of the other.[6]

The *sandhya* merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in *samadhi.* It is like the sound of a bell: *t—a—m.* The yogi, by following in the trail of the sound Om, gradually merges himself in the Supreme Brahman.[7]

Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

Meditate every day, as your mind is yet immature. Constant meditation will make the mind one-pointed. Discriminate always between the real and the unreal. Whenever you find your mind drawn to any object, think of its transitoriness, and thus try to withdraw the mind back to the thought of God. A man was angling. A bridal party was going along the road with music. But the angler's eye remained fixed on the float. The mind of a spiritual aspirant should be steadfast like that.[8]

If a person is steady in meditation, he will clearly see the Lord in his heart and hear his voice. The moment an idea flashes in his mind, it will at once be fulfilled and he will be bathed in peace.[9]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Swami Vivekananda

When the mind has been trained to remain fixed on a certain internal or external object, there comes to it the power of flowing in an unbroken current, as it were, towards that object. This state is called *dhyana* [meditation]. When one has so intensified the power of *dhyana* as to be able to reject the external part of the perception and meditate only on the internal part, the meaning, that state is called *samadhi.* The three—*dharana* (concentration), *dhyana,* and *samadhi*—together are called *samyama.*[10]

This truth about the soul is first to be heard. If you have heard it, think about it. Once you have done that, meditate upon it. No more vain arguments! Satisfy yourself once that you are the infinite spirit. If that is true, it must be nonsense that you are the body. You are the Self, and that must be realized. Spirit must see itself as spirit. Now the spirit is seeing itself as the body. That must stop. The moment you begin to realize that, you are released.[11]

Concentration is the essence of all knowledge; nothing can be done without it. Ninety percent of thought force is wasted by the ordinary human being, and therefore he is constantly committing blunders; the trained man or mind never makes a mistake.[12]

This universal struggle for freedom attains its highest expression in man in the conscious desire to be free. This freedom is attained by the threefold means of work, worship, and knowledge. (a) Work—constant, unceasing effort to help others and love others. (b) Worship—consists in prayer, praise and meditation. (c) Knowledge—that follows meditation.[13]

In perfect concentration the soul becomes actually free from the bonds of the gross body and knows itself as it is.[14]

The greatest help to spiritual life is meditation. In meditation we divest ourselves of all material conditions and feel

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

our divine nature. We do not depend upon any external help in meditation.[15]

The greatest thing is meditation. It is the nearest approach to spiritual life—the mind meditating. It is the one moment in our daily life that we are not material—the Soul thinking of Itself, free from all matter—this marvelous touch of the Soul.[16]

Think and meditate that you are the omnipresent Atman. "I am neither the body, nor the mind, nor the Buddhi (determining faculty), neither the gross nor the subtle body"—by this process of elimination, immerse your mind in the transcendent knowledge which is your real nature. Kill the mind by thus plunging it repeatedly in this. Then only you will realize the Essence of Intelligence, or be established in your real nature. Knower and known, meditator and object meditated upon, will then become one, and the cessation of all phenomenal superimpositions will follow.[17]

Samadhi is the property of every human being—nay, every animal. From the lowest animal to the highest angel, some time or other, each one will have to come to that state, and then, and then alone, will real religion begin for him.[18]

We claim that concentrating the powers of the mind is the only way to knowledge. In external science, concentration of mind is—putting it on something external; and in internal science, it is—drawing towards one's self. We call this concentration of mind Yoga. The Yogis claim a good deal. They claim that by concentration of mind every truth in the universe becomes evident to the mind, both external and internal truth.[19]

Saint Ramprasad

I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,
As I repeat my Mother Kali's name;
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk!
First my guru gives molasses for the making of the Wine;

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

My longing is the ferment to transform it.
Knowledge, the maker of the Wine, prepares it for me then;
And when it is done, my mind imbibes it from the bottle of the mantra,
Taking the Mother's name to make it pure.
Drink of this Wine, says Ramprasad, and the four fruits of life are yours.[20]

Mahabharata

In the *Mahabharata* (the *Santiparva*), there are references on meditation by Manu, Vyasa, and Vasishtha. Manu says:

> Since the mind is always stimulated by sense-objects, it is not possible for the ordinary mind to attain to the attributeless Brahman. It becomes possible only when the senses are merged in the mind, and the mind in the intellect, through uninterrupted concentration.[21]

Vyasa says:

> The process of withdrawing the intellect, the mind and the senses from external objects and merging them in the all-pervading Paramatman leads to the Supreme Knowledge. An aspirant of such Knowledge must with deep concentration of mind practice the merging of the mind into the intellect twice a day, both at dawn and dusk.[22]

In the *Vyasa Sutras* (4.1.9 and 11):

> Because the meditating [person] is compared to the immovable earth.
>
> There is no law of place [for meditation]; wherever the mind is concentrated, meditation should be practiced.[23]

Vasishtha says:

> Meditation is the greatest power of the yogis. The wise men describe meditation as concentration of mind and *pranayama*. *Pranayama* is of two types—*sagarva* and *nirgarva*. *Pranayama* practiced with *japa* is called *sagarva*,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

and when it is practiced without *japa* it is *nirgarva*. Except at the times of taking food and of excretion, one should meditate all the time. A wise man, through concentration of mind, sifts the *jivatman* from the twenty-four cosmic principles and tries to merge it in the Paramatman. The moment this unity of *jivatman* and Paramatman is established, a man becomes *jivanmukta*.[24]

Samkhya Philosophy

Through intensity of meditation there come to the Purusha all the powers of nature.

Meditation is the destruction of attachment.

It is perfected by the suppression of the modification.

It is perfected by dharana, posture, and performance of one's duties.

Meditation is also perfected by non-attachment and practice.

Though an aspirant should show devotion to many scriptures and teachers, he must take from all of them the essence only, as a bee takes the essence from many flowers.

One whose mind has become concentrated like an arrow-maker's is not disturbed in his samadhi.

As great harm is done in a worldly undertaking when the prescribed rules are violated, so it is also with meditation.

Through continence, reverence, and devotion to the guru, success is attained after a long time [as in the case of Indra].[25]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

8. The Three Key Factors in All Meditation

While the goal of all types of meditation remains the same, the kinds of meditation vary because of the different perceptions of the Ultimate Reality by different systems of thought. A spiritual seeker, depending upon his or her inner disposition, spiritual background, and preference, may choose one or another to reach the goal. Despite the differences in methods and techniques of meditation, three factors remain fixed in the practice of any kind of meditation. These three factors, which will be dealt with in turn in the next three sections of this book, are (1) the object of concentration in meditation; (2) the center of consciousness where the mind is held during meditation; and (3) the method employed to invoke concentration.

The sacred texts of Yoga and Vedanta maintain that the ideal or object of meditation must not be changed. Practice of meditation using more than one method is fraught with danger. Meditation has two aspects: meditation as the root and meditation as the fruit. Self-Knowledge, or God-vision, the fruit of meditation, is never materialized unless the meditator remains rooted in one ideal. Those who aspire for the fruit must take care of the root. Single-minded devotion to one ideal is very necessary for developing devotion, and without devotion no concentration is possible. Those who are too liberal in this sense from the beginning never develop any spiritual root. Swami Vivekananda cautions us that:

> the growing plant must be hedged round to protect it until it has grown into a tree. The tender plant of spirituality

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

will die if exposed too early to the action of a constant change of ideas and ideals. Many people, in the name of what may be called religious liberalism, may be seen feeding their idle curiosity with a continuous succession of different ideals. With them, hearing new things grows into a kind of disease, a sort of religious drink-mania. They want to hear new things just by way of getting a temporary nervous excitement, and when one such exciting influence has had its effect on them, they are ready for another. Religion is with these people a sort of intellectual opium-eating, and there it ends. "There is another sort of man," says Bhagavan Ramakrishna, "who is like the pearl-oyster of the story. The pearl-oyster leaves its bed at the bottom of the sea and comes up to the surface to catch the rain-water when the star Svati is in the ascendant. It floats about on the surface of the sea with its shell wide open until it has succeeded in catching a drop of the rain-water, and then it dives deep down to its sea-bed and there rests until it has succeeded in fashioning a beautiful pearl out of that raindrop."[1]

The second factor is the center of consciousness. The object of concentration generally is held in a particular center within, such as the heart, the forehead, or the crown of the head. Or the seeker may place the ideal outside his body, in front of him. In either case the position must remain unchanged. Frequent shifting of the center or position obstructs the development of concentration. If concentration is likened to digging or dredging deep within, then we must dig in one spot.

The third factor is the method employed to invoke concentration. Such methodology is either selected by the seeker or prescribed by the teacher, and it also must not be changed. By following the same methodology continuously, the seeker makes a groove or track, as it were, in the mind. A habit is formed, and in course of time the mind naturally flows in the familiar track and meditation becomes effortless. It is a common experience that if one regularly walks along a green lawn, keeping to the same path, eventually a visible track is formed, and one is likely to always follow the same path. Similarly, when a seeker in meditation follows one ideal, sits

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

in the same position, meditates at fixed hours, and uses the same method and steps, such practice cuts a deep channel in his consciousness. His conscious and effortful practice eventually becomes natural and spontaneous.

Many people think that meditation is a process of passive reflection or just letting things happen, but actually it is a conscious process of guiding the mind by oneself. In meditation it is the alertness of the mind that matters most, not the length of time devoted to meditation. Meditation becomes counterproductive when separated from its spiritual goal or practiced in an unorthodox way or without moral and ethical preparation. It is dangerous for an impure mind to practice concentration because it brings about a severe backlash in the form of falling into the depths of the subconscious.

So the *Bhagavad Gita* cautions us: "Yoga is hard to attain...by a man who cannot control himself; but it can be attained by him who has controlled himself and who strives by right means."[2]

And the *Katha Upanishad* states:

> When the five instruments of knowledge [eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin] stand still, together with the mind, and when the intellect does not move, that is called the Supreme State.

This, the firm control of the senses, is what is called yoga. One must then be vigilant; for yoga can be both beneficial and injurious.[3]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Part Two

Objects of Meditation

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

9. Objects of Meditation in Yoga and Vedanta

Objects of Meditation in Yoga

The object or ideal selected for the practice of concentration and meditation may be concrete or abstract, a word or an idea, an image or a symbol, a divine form or personality. The *Yoga Aphorisms* of Patanjali mention the following as possible objects of meditation:[1]

1. *The effulgent or radiant light which is beyond all sorrow.* This is the light of spiritual consciousness that, according to the ancient seers, shines in the inner recess of the heart and is beyond all sorrow. The aspirant imagines in his heart a limitless, skylike, transparent brilliance and then thinks that the Self is within that.
2. *The heart of an illumined soul that is free from all passion and attachment*—that is, the heart of a holy personality to whom one feels drawn and in whom one has faith. The heart of such a personality is always tranquil. By concentrating on such a heart, the mind absorbs that tranquillity.
3. *A dream experience or the experience of deep sleep*—that is, a dream about a holy personality or a divine symbol, or a blissful condition in sleep that makes a deep impression on the mind. In dreams, perceptions of the external world are shut out and thoughts in the mind appear vivid. One may meditate on any such vivid dream in three ways: (a) by forming a mental image of a dream object and thinking of it as real; (b) by meditating upon a recollected dream condition and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

maintaining that meditative state; and (c) by concentrating upon any spiritually uplifting dream experience.

Dreamless sleep is that state where external and internal perceptions become obscured and only a sense of passiveI-consciousness remains. This passive I-consciousness may also be the object of meditation.

4. *Anything that is spiritually uplifting.* Such a thing may be a place, some scenery, an idea, or any other thing that would evoke concentration of mind. If the mind can be concentrated on one object, it also can be concentrated on any other object.

Meditation, according to the system of Yoga, is more an objective technique than worship as conventionally understood. The goal of meditation is the cessation of all miseries through the realization of the indwelling Self, or Purusha, which is Pure Consciousness. The Yoga system maintains that the cause of all miseries is ignorance, which deludes the Self and entangles It in the world of matter. This entanglement is essentially of the mind, and the remedy lies in disentangling the Self from the world of matter and the world of mind. This is possible only through the knowledge of Reality, for knowledge brings power: we gain control over a thing only when we truly know it.

The Yoga system contends that the world of matter and the world of mind are not two different worlds. Matter is really the evolved form of the mind. When the real nature of the mind is known, it no longer deludes the Self. Then only does the Self shine in Its own glory. Meditation is used as a technique to gain this knowledge. In this technique, willpower plays an important role. Through the exercise of willpower, the mind consciously and deliberately cultivates a single thought to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Meditation begins with concentration on a single object and culminates in absorption in that object. Absorption reveals the real nature of the object. By knowing the real nature of one object, one is able to know the reality of all objects in the universe, since everything is made of the same mind-stuff.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Objects of Meditation in Vedanta

According to the tradition of Vedanta, the objects that are generally preferred for the practice of meditation are the following:

1. a divine form
2. an Incarnation of God
3. the divine Lord as inmost Self or Supreme Teacher
4. Virata Purusha, or the Cosmic Person
5. the sacred word Om
6. Gayatri mantra, or the sacred prayer of the Vedas
7. the meaning of any of the four *mahavakyas,* or great Vedic sayings
8. the meaning of a sacred text, word, or mystic syllable

A seeker may select any of these for the practice of meditation, and through such meditation he or she is purified of all sins and attains the summit of Self-realization. Meditation should be practiced on only one object. To practice meditation on different objects leads to mental confusion and defeats the very purpose of meditation.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

10. Meditation on a Divine Form

The *Ishtadevata*, or chosen divine form, is that object of meditation which represents a deity to the worshipper, such as Shiva, Kali, or Vishnu. The unconditioned Brahman, being transcendental and nondual by nature, cannot be the object of prayer or worship, since no relationship whatsoever can be established with It. On the other hand, the average person, being a victim of the various miseries of life, needs a savior to pray to, a Personal God, benign and compassionate, in whom he can take refuge in the hour of trial and tribulation. The average seeker thus needs some sort of personal deity to represent the transcendental, nondual Brahman; this manifestation can bestow Its grace upon all who pray to It in distress.

If one were to compare the transcendental Brahman to the infinite ocean of Pure Consciousness, then the conditioned Brahman would be the biggest wave on that ocean. The various deities are so many facets of this conditioned Brahman, or Personal God. Through a divine form the seeker gets a glimpse of the infinite light of God. When a seeker selects any such form for worship and meditation, it becomes the *Ishtadevata* for that seeker. The *Ishtadevata* is, as it were, a form chiseled out of the infinite and all-pervading God.

Swami Vivekananda describes the concept in the following way:

> The word Ishta is derived from the root *ish*, to desire, choose.... Each one sees God according to his own nature; and this vision, conditioned by our own nature, is our

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> Ishta.... This would seem at first to be a contradiction in terms, but we must remember that an absolute truth is only one, while relative truths are necessarily various.... This theory of Ishta, therefore, means allowing a man to choose his own religion. One man should not force another to worship what he worships. All attempts to herd together human beings by means of armies, force, or arguments, to drive them pell-mell into the same enclosure and make them worship the same God have failed, and will always fail, because it is constitutionally impossible to do so. Not only so, there is the danger of arresting their growth. You scarcely meet any man or woman who is not struggling for some sort of religion; and how many are satisfied, or rather how few are satisfied! How few find anything! And why? Simply because most of them go after impossible tasks. They are forced into these by the dictation of others.... There are so many ideals; I have no right to say what shall be your ideal, to force any ideal on you. My duty should be to lay before you all the ideals I know of and enable you to see by your own constitution what you like best, and which is most fitted to you. Take up that which suits you best and persevere in it. This is your Ishta, your special ideal.[1]

Swami Vivekananda then goes on to describe the very private and personal nature of this relationship:

> This Ishta should be kept secret; it is between you and God. All theoretical portions of religion can be preached in public and made congregational, but higher religion cannot be made public. I cannot get ready my religious feelings at a moment's notice.... The Ishta is *sacred,* not secret. But in what sense? Why should I not speak of my Ishta to others? Because it is my own most holy thing. It may help others, but how do I know that it will not rather hurt them? There may be a man whose nature is such that he cannot worship a Personal God, but can only worship as an Impersonal God his own highest Self. Suppose I leave him among you,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

and he tells you that there is no Personal God, but only God as the Self in you or me. You will be shocked. His ideal is sacred but not secret.[2]

It has often been contended that the idea of the *Ishtadevata* leads to sectarianism. In answer to this, Swami Vivekananda says:

> You cannot make all conform to the same ideas; that is a fact, and I thank God that it is so. I am not against any sect. I am glad that sects exist, and I only wish they may go on multiplying more and more. Why? Simply because of this: If you and I and all who are present here were to think exactly the same thoughts, there would be no thoughts for us to think. We know that two or more forces must come into collision in order to produce motion. It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakens thought. Now, if we all thought alike, we should be like Egyptian mummies in a museum, looking vacantly at one another's faces—no more than that. Whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead water. When religions are dead, there will be no more sects; it will be the perfect peace and harmony of the grave. But so long as mankind thinks, there will be sects. Variation is the sign of life, and it must be there. I pray that sects may multiply so that at last there will be as many sects as human beings and each one will have his own method, his individual method of thought, in religion.[3]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

11. Meditation on a Divine Incarnation

An Incarnation *(avatara)* of God is a unique manifestation of the conditioned Brahman. Vedanta maintains that God incarnates in human form to fulfill a cosmic need whenever and wherever such a need arises. The *Bhagavad Gita* expresses the spirit of Vedanta in Lord Krishna's words: "Though I am unborn and eternal by nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, subjugating My Prakriti, I accept birth through My own *maya.* Whenever there is a decline of *dharma,* O Bharata, and a rise of *adharma,* I incarnate Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma, I am born in every age."[1]

The embodiment of God as an Incarnation is different from the embodiment of other human beings. God assumes a human form through a self-imposed limitation of His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. He chooses to dwell in a human body and acts like a human being. His activities in the world are for the purpose of setting an example to humanity. The human body of God is only an appearance that He assumes and discards at will. The births and deaths of all created beings are subject to His will, for the Lord is the controller of Divine Will Itself. An Incarnation is different from a saint: while a saint is a seeker of liberation, an Incarnation is a giver of liberation. Eternal spiritual truths are expressed again and again through Incarnations so that they may be grasped by the average man or woman of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna made a number of statements regarding Incarnations:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

However great and infinite God may be, His Essence can and does manifest itself through man by His mere will. God's Incarnation as a man cannot be explained by analogy. One must feel it for oneself and realize it by direct perception. An analogy can give us only a little glimpse. By touching the horns, legs, or tail of a cow, we in fact touch the cow herself; but for us the essential thing about a cow is her milk, which comes through the udder. The Divine Incarnation is like the udder. God incarnates Himself as man from time to time in order to teach people devotion and divine love.[2]

Ordinary people do not recognize the advent of an Incarnation of God. He comes in secret. Only a few of His intimate disciples can recognize Him.[3]

One can taste devotion and love of God only through His Incarnations. Infinite are the ways of God's play, but what I need is love and devotion. I want only the milk. The milk comes through the udder of the cow. The Incarnation is the udder.[4]

The Incarnation is the play of the Absolute as man. Do you know how the Absolute plays as man? It is like the rushing down of water from a big roof through a pipe; the power of Satchidananda—nay, Satchidananda Itself—descends through the conduit of a human form as water descends through the pipe. Only twelve sages, Bharadvaja and the others, recognized Rama as an Incarnation of God.[5]

God, incarnating Himself as man, behaves exactly like a man. That is why it is difficult to recognize an Incarnation. When God becomes man, He is exactly like man. He has the same hunger, thirst, disease, grief, and sometimes even fear. Rama was stricken with grief for Sita. Krishna carried on His head the shoes and wooden stool of His father Nanda.[6]

The Incarnations of God belong to the class of the Ishvarakotis. They roam about in the open spaces. They are

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> never imprisoned in the world, never entangled by it. Their ego is not the "thick ego" of worldly people. The ego, the "I-consciousness," of worldly people is like four walls and a roof: the man inside them cannot see anything outside. The ego of the Incarnations and other Ishvarakotis is a "thin ego": through it they have an uninterrupted vision of God. Take the case of a man who stands by a wall on both sides of which there are meadows stretching to infinity. If there is a hole in the wall, through it he can see everything on the other side. If the hole is a big one, he can even pass through it. The ego of the Incarnations and other Ishvarakotis is like the wall with a hole. Though they remain on this side of the wall, still they can see the endless meadow on the other side. That is to say, though they have a human body, they are always united with God. Again, if they will, they can pass through the big hole to the other side and remain in samadhi. And if the hole is big enough, they can go through it and come back again. That is to say, though established in samadhi, they can again descend to the worldly plane.[7]

Sri Ramakrishna stresses the difference between a God-man and an ordinary person *(jiva)*, in regard to the attainment of *samadhi:* "Through worship and austerity, a *jiva* can at the utmost attain *samadhi;* but he cannot come down from that state. On the other hand, an Incarnation of God can come down from *samadhi.*"[8] Elsewhere he emphasizes why the Divine Incarnation is so necessary to human understanding, despite the omnipresent transcendence of the Divine: "God incarnates Himself on earth in a human body. He is, no doubt, present everywhere and in all beings, but man's longing is not satisfied unless he sees God in a human form. Man's need is not satisfied without the Divine Incarnation."[9]

Regarding Incarnations of God, Swami Vivekananda says:

> Higher and nobler than all ordinary teachers in the world is another set of teachers, the Avataras of Isvara [Incarnations of God]. They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. At their command the lowest and most

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

degraded characters become saints in one second. They are the Teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestations of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them. And indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship. No man can really see God except through these human manifestations. If we try to see God otherwise, we make for ourselves a hideous caricature of Him and believe the caricature to be as good as the original. There is a story of an ignorant man who was asked to make an image of the God Siva, and who, after days of hard struggle, manufactured only the image of a monkey. So whenever we try to think of God as He is in His absolute perfection, we invariably meet with the most miserable failure; because as long as we are men we cannot conceive Him as being anything higher than a man. The time will come when we shall transcend our human nature and know Him as He is; but as long as we are men we must worship Him in man and as a man.[10]

In another well-known metaphor, he adds:

By our present constitution we are limited and bound to see God as a man. If, for instance, the buffaloes want to worship God, they will, in keeping with their own nature, see Him as a huge buffalo; if the fish want to worship God, they will have to form an idea of Him as a big fish; and men have to think of Him as a man. And these various conceptions are not due to a morbidly active imagination. Man, buffalo, and fish all may be supposed to represent so many different vessels, so to say. All these vessels go to the sea of God to get filled with water, each according to its own shape and capacity. In the man, the water takes the shape of a man, in the buffalo, the shape of a buffalo, and in the fish, the shape of a fish. In each of these vessels there is the same water of the sea of God. When men see Him, they see Him as a man, and the animals, if they have any conception of God at all, must see Him as an animal, each according to his own ideal. So we cannot help seeing God as a

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

man; and therefore we are bound to worship Him as a man. There is no other way. Two kinds of men do not worship God as a man: the human brute, who has no religion, and the *paramahamsa,* who has risen beyond all the weaknesses of humanity and has transcended the limits of his own nature. To him all nature has become his own Self. He alone can worship God as He is. Here too, as in all other cases, the two extremes meet. The extreme of ignorance and the other extreme of knowledge—neither of these goes through acts of worship. The human brute does not worship because of his ignorance, and the *jivanmuktas,* the free souls, do not worship because they have realized God in themselves. If anyone between these two poles of existence tells you that he is not going to worship God as a man, kindly beware of that person. He is, not to use any harsher term, an irresponsible talker; his religion is for unsound and empty brains.[11]

Comparing the Incarnation to the Personal God, Swami Vivekananda states:

The Personal God is necessary, and at the same time we know that instead of and better than vain imaginations of a Personal God, which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred are unworthy of human worship, we have in this world, living and walking in our midst, living Gods, now and then. These are more worthy of worship than any imaginary God, any creation of our imagination, that is to say, any idea of God which we can form. Sri Krishna is much greater than any idea of God you or I can have. Buddha is a much higher idea, a more living and idolized idea, than the ideal you or I can conceive of in our minds, and therefore it is that they always command the worship of mankind, even to the exclusion of all imaginary deities. This our sages knew, and therefore left it open to all Indian people to worship such great personages, such Incarnations.[12]

Swami Vivekananda points out that knowledge gained through an Incarnation is very different from theoretical knowledge:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

We talk of principles, we think of theories, and that is all right; but every thought and every movement, every one of our actions, shows that we can only understand a principle when it comes to us through a person. We can only grasp an idea when it comes to us through a concrete ideal person. We can only understand the precept through the example. Would to God that all of us were so developed that we did not require any example, did not require any persons. But that we are not; and naturally the vast majority of mankind have put their souls at the feet of these extraordinary personalities, the Prophets, the Incarnations of God—Incarnations worshipped by the Christians, by the Buddhists, and by the Hindus.[13]

Swami Vivekananda adds:

"When a huge tidal wave comes," says Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, "all the little brooks and ditches become full to the brim without any effort or consciousness on their own part; so when an Incarnation comes, a tidal wave of spirituality breaks upon the world, and people feel spirituality in the very air."[14]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

12. Meditation on the Lord as Inmost Self and Supreme Teacher

As the object of meditation, we may choose to meditate on the Divine Lord as our inmost Self and Supreme Teacher. This approach is "qualified nondualistic," rather than being either nondualistic or dualistic.

In the nondualistic approach, the seeker negates, through discrimination, all the diversities of the universe and concentrates only on the Self, the all-pervading and immutable Pure Consciousness, One without a second. This approach is direct but difficult and can be practiced only by a very select few. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says: "The task of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest [the indefinable and incomprehensible Absolute] is more difficult; for the ideal of the Unmanifest is hard to attain for those who are embodied."[1]

In the dualistic approach, the seeker looks upon the same impersonal, absolute Pure Consciousness as having a finite and definite form such as Shiva, Vishnu, Kali, or Durga, or as a Divine Incarnation such as Rama or Krishna, endowed with divine and auspicious qualities. The many forms of the Divine Lord are not creations of the human mind but are diverse manifestations of one and the same God. The scriptures of Vedanta maintain that the Supreme Lord assumes a personal form for the welfare of His devotees. Any of these personal forms is like a window opening onto the horizon of the Infinite. One may use a finger to point out the moon, but the finger is not the moon. In the same way, a particular form is not the Reality Itself but is an indicator of It.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

In qualified nondualism, the Ultimate Reality is looked upon not merely as all-pervading Pure Consciousness but also as the Supreme Purusha, the Soul of all souls. While individual souls are *purushas*, or persons, God is Purushottama, the Supreme Purusha or Person. Patanjali describes God as a "special Being" in whom knowledge is perfect and who is the Teacher of all teachers, the Supreme Teacher.

The approach of qualified nondualism is neither personal nor impersonal, but is personal-impersonal. The Lord is both transcendent and immanent, both personal and impersonal. Just as the soul controls the body from within but is not affected by bodily changes or imperfections, so also God controls the universe from within as its Inner Controller but is not affected by the changes and imperfections in the universe. The concept of the Divine Lord, in qualified nondualism, is more anthropopsychic than anthropomorphic. That is, the Ultimate Reality, even though It is infinite and formless, is a Personal Being possessed of human feelings and thoughts.

The various conceptions of God are relative to individual needs. Depending upon the individual spiritual evolution, some like to think of God as a Person with form, some as personality without form, and some as all-pervading Spirit. The method of approach and the mode of address depend upon the mood and the temperament of the individual seeker. As is written in the *Manu Smriti* (Laws of Manu):

> The ruler of all, who is minuter than the minutest atom, bright like gold, amenable to dream cognition [practice of meditation]—Him should one know as the Highest Purusha. This some people say is Agni; others, Manu-Prajapati; others, Indra; others, Prana; and yet others, the Eternal Brahman.[2]

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says:

> May He—the One without a second—Who, though formless and without any purpose of His own, produces various forms by means of His manifold powers, from Whom the Universe comes into being in the beginning of creation, and to Whom it returns in the end, endow us with good thoughts.[3]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The various scriptures of Vedanta describe meditation on the Divine Lord as the inmost Self and Supreme Teacher:

> Atman [the Self], smaller than the small, greater than the great, is hidden in the hearts of all living creatures.
>
> —*KATHA UPANISHAD*[4]

> He who inhabits all beings, yet is within all beings, whom no beings know, whose body all beings are, and who controls all beings from within—He is your Self, the Inner Controller, the Immortal.
>
> —*BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD*[5]

> I bow to Thee, O Thou blissful Self. I bow to Thee, O secret of secrets. Thou art beyond all thought and limitation. Thou art without beginning and without end. I bow to Thee.
>
> —*MAITRAYANI UPANISHAD*[6]

> The divine Being who dwells in the moving and the non-moving, but is Himself immutable; who is the light of knowledge and the dispeller of blinding darkness—Him, the dweller in the heart of all beings, I behold. Him, the Supreme Self, I salute.
>
> —*YOGASHIKHA UPANISHAD*[7]

> In the citadel of the body there is the small, sinless and pure lotus of the heart which is the residence of the Supreme. Further in the interior of this small area there is the sorrowless Ether. That is to be meditated upon continually.
>
> —*MAHANARAYANA UPANISHAD*[8]

> We contemplate on the Indweller of all. We meditate upon the Lord supreme. May that destroyer of all ills ever direct us.
>
> —*TAITTIRIYA ARANYAKA*[9]

> We contemplate on the supreme abode of all. We meditate upon the effulgent yet unmanifest Being. May that all-pervading Lord ever inspire us.
>
> —*TAITTIRIYA ARANYAKA*[10]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

I am the Self, O Gudakesa, seated in the hearts of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all beings.

—*BHAGAVAD GITA*[11]

The Supreme Spirit in the body is said to be the one who is the Witness and the Approver, the Supporter and the Enjoyer, and who is the Sovereign Lord and the Highest Self.

—*BHAGAVAD GITA*[12]

As the *akasa* that pervades all things is not stained, because of its subtlety, even so the Self dwelling in the body everywhere is not stained.

—*BHAGAVAD GITA*[13]

I bow to the true divine Guru. He, my Lord, is the Lord of the universe. He, my Guru, is the Guru of the universe. He, my Self, is the Self of the universe.

—*VISHVASARA TANTRA*[14]

Lord, Thou abidest in all; Thou art all; Thou assumest all forms; Thou art the origin of all; Thou art the Self of all. Salutations unto Thee.

—*VISHNU PURANA*[15]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

13. Meditation on Virata Purusha, the Cosmic Person

According to Vedanta, when Brahman, the absolute Pure Consciousness, manifests Itself within the bounds of time, space, and causation, It is called Virata Purusha, or the Cosmic Person. The Cosmic Person is also known as Brahman's universal form. The seeker may choose this form of the Divine Lord as the object of meditation.

The Upanishads describe the Cosmic Person in sublime language:

> Whence the sun rises and whither it goes to set, in whom all the *devas* (gods) are contained, and whom none can ever pass beyond.
>
> —*Katha Upanishad*[1]

> He who consists of the mind, whose body is subtle, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like the akasa [space], whose creation is this universe, who cherishes all [righteous] desires, who contains all [pleasant] odours, who is endowed with all tastes, who embraces all this, who never speaks, and who is without longing.
>
> —*Chhandogya Upanishad*[2]

The universe is His body; the process of creation is His outbreathing and inbreathing. In the body of the Cosmic Person countless universes are interwoven; in Him everything disappears, like bubbles in the ocean; and again from out of Him everything comes to manifestation, like bubbles rising to the surface. A hymn of the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Rig Veda addressed to the Purusha describes His universal form as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet. He covers the universe on all sides and transcends it "by ten fingers' breadth."[3] He alone is the Lord of all, mortal and immortal:

> His hands and feet are everywhere; His eyes, heads, and faces are everywhere; His ears are everywhere; He exists compassing all.
>
> —*SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD*[4]

> The heavens are His head; the sun and moon, His eyes; the quarters, His ears; the revealed Vedas, His speech; the wind is His breath; the universe, His heart. From His feet is produced the earth. He is, indeed, the Inner Self of all beings.
>
> —*MUNDAKA UPANISHAD*[5]

This universal form comprises not only our earth and the galactic system to which it belongs, but all the fourteen worlds of Hindu mythology—the seven above and the seven below—and all the animate and inanimate creatures dwelling therein, including gods and angels, men and animals, birds and insects, trees, plants, and shrubs. This totality is the Lord's universal form.

The Upanishads sometimes describe the Cosmic Person as Maheshvara, the Supreme Lord of all Lords:[6] "To whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing smaller or greater; who stands alone."[7]

Who, then, are the other Lords? In answer to this question, the seers of Vedanta maintain that there are innumerable universes that constantly appear and disappear in the Ocean of the Great Cause. Our universe, with its planets and their satellites, which revolve with the sun as their center, is only one of an infinite number of such universes, and each universe has its own Lord, its controller, a manifestation of Brahman, the Absolute. The Lord is called Ishvara. He has three aspects: as Brahma He creates, as Vishnu He preserves, and as Shiva He destroys. Since the universes are without number, so too are the Brahmas, Vishnus, and Shivas without number. Vedanta says that one may be able to count the grains of sand on the seashore, but one will never be able to count the number of universes or the deities controlling them.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Maheshvara is One without a second. While each Ishvara is the Lord of one universe alone, Maheshvara is the Lord of all Ishvaras and of countless universes. The first manifestation of Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with attributes, in the relative universe is called *Hiranyagarbha.* The next manifestation of Saguna Brahman is the Godhead dwelling in every heart as the Inner Controller.

Though possessing individuality, Maheshvara identifies Himself with all the universes: He is the ruler of all and the inner guide of all beings. By His command, the sun, moon, stars, and planets perform their respective functions; the seasons and years follow each other in orderly succession. He is the fear of fear, the life of life, the death of death. He covers innumerable universes and also extends beyond.

The universal form of the Supreme Lord has been described in most vivid language in the *Bhagavad Gita,* where Arjuna says to Sri Krishna: "As You have declared Yourself to be, O Supreme Lord—even so it is. Yet do I desire to see Your Ishvara-form, O Supreme Purusha."[8] In answer, Sri Krishna says to Arjuna: "Behold My forms, O Partha, by the hundreds and the thousands—manifold and divine, various in shape and hue.... But with these eyes of yours you cannot see Me. I give you a divine eye; behold, now, My sovereign yoga-power."[9]

Endowed with divine vision, Arjuna sees the Virata form of the Lord: countless universes with their manifold diversities all gathered into one. If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendor of the Supreme Lord. Overcome with wonder and fear, his hair standing on end, Arjuna prays:

> In Thy body, O Lord, I behold all the gods and all the diverse hosts of beings—the Lord Brahma, seated on the lotus, and all the *rishis* and the celestial serpents. I behold Thee with myriads of arms and bellies, with myriads of faces and eyes; I behold Thee, infinite in form, on every side, but I see not Thy end nor Thy middle nor Thy beginning, O Lord of the Universe, O Universal Form!... I behold Thee as one without beginning, middle, or end; with infinite arms and immeasurable strength; with the sun and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> moon as Thine eyes; with Thy face shining like a blazing fire; and burning with Thy radiance the whole universe. By Thee alone are filled all the space between heaven and earth, and all the quarters of the sky. O Mighty One, the three worlds behold Thy marvelous and appalling form and tremble with fear.[10]

The universal form embodies the vast extent of creation, preservation, and dissolution; past, present, and future; gods, men, animals, and all other beings and things. One blessed with the exalted vision beholds all this simultaneously in one instant.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

14. Meditation on the Sacred Word Om

The sacred word Om is the primordial sound from which all other sounds emerge. It underlies all phonetic creations. The sounds of different languages and dialects are the various modifications and diversifications of the primordial sound Om. The utterance of Om, consisting of the three letters *A*, *U*, and *M*, covers the whole process of articulation. It is like the sound of a gong that gradually tapers to a point and merges in silence.

The sound Om embraces all levels of existence from the grossest to the finest. It signifies the correlation between the microcosm and the macrocosm in all aspects. The three letters *A*, *U*, *M* represent respectively the gross, the subtle, and the causal aspects of the Cosmic Being. The silence in which the sound merges represents the Pure Being underlying the three aspects. No other word conveys the significance of the Ultimate Reality so profoundly as the word Om. It is thus the most all-inclusive and most potent name of God. Any other name of God preceded by Om attains these qualities.

Swami Vivekananda says:

> There are hundreds of words for God. One thought is connected with a great many words; the idea of God is connected with hundreds of words, and each one stands as a symbol for God. Very good. But there must be a generalization among these words, some substratum, some common ground of all these symbols; and that which is the common symbol will be the best and will really represent

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> them all. In making a sound we use the larynx and the palate as a sounding-board. Is there any articulate sound of which all other sounds are manifestations, one which is the most natural sound? Om (Aum) is such a sound, the basis of all sounds.
>
> The first letter, *A* (pronounced like *aw* in *dawn*), is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate; *M* represents the last sound in the series, being produced with closed lips, and the *U* rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding-board of the mouth. Thus Om represents the whole phenomenon of sound production. As such, it must be the natural symbol, the matrix of all the various sounds. It denotes the whole range and possibility of all the words that can be uttered.... Take, for instance, the English word *God.* It covers only a limited function; and if you go beyond it you have to add adjectives to make it the Personal or Impersonal or Absolute God. So with the words for God in every other language; their signification is very limited. This word Om, however, has around it all the various significances.[1]

Om is considered the seed mantra, for it is the source of all other mantras and of all compounded sounds. The Tantras greatly extol the efficacy of mantras, just as the Vedas extol sacrifices, hymns, and other disciplines. The word *mantra* means literally "that which when reflected upon gives liberation." As the supreme mantra, Om is the sound equivalent of Brahman, the all-pervading and undifferentiated Pure Consciousness. Sound vibration is the very first manifestation of consciousness at the time of creation. This sound vibration is intermediate between Pure Consciousness and the physical object, being neither absolutely beyond sense perception like the former, nor tangible like the latter. Sound vibration and creative expression are the two parallel manifestations of the same Pure Consciousness. To the ignorant, the vibration created by the utterance of the mantra is merely a sound phenomenon, but to the adept, it is both illuminative and creative. Illumination remains hidden in the mantra, just as an oak tree remains hidden in the acorn. Through repetition with faith and devotion, the mantra reveals its wonderful

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

latent power. Mantras are mystical formulas, just like the equations and notations of chemistry and physics. They appear to be meaningless jargon to the unenlightened, but to those who know their significance, they are means of releasing unthinkable power.

Om in the *Mandukya Upanishad*

The *Mandukya Upanishad* describes Om as all that is and all that we see and perceive, with its three letters symbolizing the totality of our experiences. We gather all our experiences in the three states of our existence: waking, dream, and deep sleep. *A* represents the waking state, *U* the dream state, and *M* the state of deep sleep.

During the waking period, we experience external objects. Our sense organs open up, as it were, before the external world. In the same way, we open our mouth before uttering the letter *A*. The letter *U* is compared to the dream state, when our waking experiences become subtle or transformed into mental images. Similarly, when we utter *U*, the gross sound of *A* becomes more subtle. Finally, in the state of deep, dreamless sleep, all differentiated experiences are converted into a featureless experience. While uttering *M*, we close the entire phenomenon of sound production.

Om is thus the symbol of the entire universe of thought and perception that we experience in all our three states. This is shown in more detail in the following free translations of relevant verses of the *Mandukya Upanishad* (with commentary in italic type within brackets):

> All that we see in the phenomenal world is the word Om. The interpretation of Om, the symbol of the Supreme Brahman, is the following: Everything in the past, present, and future is, verily, included in Om. Even all that is beyond the triple conception of time is also Om.
>
> All this sense-perceived world is, verily, Brahman; this Atman [*our inmost Self*] is Brahman. This Atman has four quarters.
>
> The first quarter [foot] is known as Vaishvanara [*also called Vishva*], whose sphere of activity is the state of waking, who is conscious of the external [*world*], who is endowed with seven limbs [head, eyes, breath, middle part

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

of the body, kidney, fat, and mouth], and nineteen mouths [*five organs of perception, five organs of action, five* pranas, *mind,* buddhi, *ego or* ahamkara, *and* chitta *or mind-stuff or memory*], who is the experiencer of gross objects. [*This is the description of man as he functions in the waking state.*]

The second quarter is known as Taijasa, whose sphere of activity is that of dream, who is cognizant of the internal or mental experiences, who is endowed with seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and whose experiences consist of the subtle. [*This is the description of the functioning of a person in dreams. So far as the limbs and organs are concerned, he is not different from the waking man. But from the waking state, we know that the dream-ego has only internal or mental experiences.*]

The third quarter is known as Prajna, when the man in a state of deep sleep has no desires, nor does he see any dreams. Therefore the third quarter has for its sphere of activity the state of deep sleep, in which [*unlike the first two quarters*] all experiences become one and homogeneous; it is a mass of consciousness; it is full of bliss; and it is the doorway to the conscious experiences of the dream and waking states. [*This is the description of the man in deep sleep.*]

This [*the Self in a state of deep sleep*] is the Lord of all, the Knower of all, the inner guide, the Cause of all, and the beginning as well as the final resort of all beings.[2]

The one Atman appears in these three states. These states are but the *upadhis,* or attributes of the Self. The Atman, identifying Itself with Vishva, experiences the gross objects of the waking state; again, identifying Itself with Taijasa, experiences the subtle objects of the dream state. The same Atman, identifying Itself with Prajna, enjoys bliss in the state of deep sleep. These are the three kinds of experience of the Atman, or Self, in the phenomenal world. Vishva is satisfied with gross objects; Taijasa is satisfied with subtle objects; and Prajna enjoys bliss. These are the three kinds of satisfaction the Self enjoys in the relative world.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> The *Turiya* [*the Absolute*] is not conscious of the internal, nor of the external, nor of them both. It is not a mass of consciousness, nor is it a simple consciousness. It is not unconsciousness. It is unseen, intangible, incomprehensible, uninferrable, inconceivable, indescribable [*by word, etc.*], the one changeless Consciousness persisting in the three states. It is the negation of the manifold [*the phenomenal world*], ever peaceful, all-bliss, and nondual. It is the Self. It is called the fourth [*only in relation to the other three states; in fact it is transcendental. It is not a state, but is the substratum of all other states*].[3]

The *Turiya* alone, changeless and the Lord of all, is capable of destroying the miseries associated with the threes states of Prajna, Taijasa, and Vishva. It alone is the one real substratum of all the illusory entities that are perceived to exist. This *Turiya* is radiant, the Lord of all.

Turiya is not a state of consciousness. It is the very ground of all the states. The states of Vishva and Taijasa are governed by the law of cause and effect; that is to say, these two states, waking and dreaming, are characterized by the nonapprehension or wrong apprehension of Reality. Prajna (deep sleep) is the causal state and is characterized by total unawareness of Reality. *Turiya,* being the real Self, is always all-seeing. It is the eternal subject of all acts of perception. As It is all-seeing, causality in the form of ignorance of Reality, or comprehension of Reality, cannot exist in It.

The common feature of Prajna and *Turiya* is the noncognition of duality. Prajna is the state of deep sleep, in which there is no awareness of the world of duality, yet the causal idea of the world persists in seed form. *Turiya,* however, is free from sleep and from the nonapprehension of Reality. The ignorance of Reality in the Prajna state is the cause of the perception of the manifold (the phenomenal world of duality, in which there is the illusion of manyness and separateness) in the other two states, waking and dreaming. But in *Turiya,* knowledge is never nonexistent. The waking and dream states are characterized by dream and sleep—that is, the wrong apprehension and nonapprehension of Reality. In Prajna there exists only sleep without dream, but in *Turiya* there

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

exists neither sleep nor dream. It is beyond the law of causality. The nature of *Turiya* is that of undiminished consciousness, like the eternal radiance of the sun.

The dream state is characterized by the wrong apprehension of Reality, like the illusion of seeing a piece of rope as a snake, which is characteristic of both the Vishva and Taijasa states. Nonapprehension of Reality is the characteristic of all the three states. With the destruction of dream and sleep—that is, the illusion of causality—one realizes *Turiya*, or one's real nature. When the *jiva* (the living being) awakens from the sleep of *maya* (illusion), which is beginningless, then he realizes himself as unborn, sleepless, dreamless, and One without a second.

Devoid of the knowledge of the Self, the ignorant come under the snare of illusion characterized by nonapprehension and wrong apprehension of Reality. Deluded, one thinks of oneself as father or mother, son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter, the owner of a house or property, as happy or miserable, and so on. One acts under the influence of such illusion during the waking and dream states. With the dawning of Self-Knowledge, one discovers that he is not subject to the law of cause and effect and that his nature is that of ultimate and transcendental Reality. Then one is awakened from the beginningless slumber and realizes his true nature.

Had this illusion of manifold experience really existed, then undoubtedly it could be destroyed. But this duality is only illusory, nonduality being the ultimate Truth. Even when one perceives the manifold, he really perceives the *Turiya*, as when a person perceives an illusory snake but is really looking at a rope; the snake is just in his mind. The illusion being nonexistent, one cannot even speak of its real destruction.

Turiya alone exists in the three states. It is only due to illusion that we separate *Turiya* from the three states and see in them the illusory phenomena of causality. Therefore, even the idea of the manifold would disappear if its disappearance were imagined by anyone. Such ideas as "teacher," "student," and "teaching" are imagined only to dispel the illusion that one perceives in the three states. Once Reality is known, one never perceives any duality.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

To continue from the *Mandukya Upanishad*:

> The same Atman [*which has been described above as having four quarters*] is, again, Aum, from the point of view of the syllables. The Aum with parts is viewed from the standpoint of sounds [*letters*]. The quarters are the letters [*parts*] and the letters are the quarters. The letters here are *A*, *U*, and *M*.[4]

In the foregoing passage, the states of Atman have been described. Aum is the symbol or signifier of Atman. Here the signifier and the thing signified are identical. Therefore Atman and Aum are identical. As the Atman has four quarters (*Turiya* being called the fourth quarter in a figurative sense only), so also Aum has four quarters or measures corresponding to those of Atman.

> The first measure, *A*, is Vaishvanara, whose sphere of activity is the waking state, on account of its all-pervasiveness or on account of its being the first. He who knows this has all his desires fulfilled and is the first of all.[5]

A is present in all sounds. No utterance of sound is possible without opening the lips, which produces the *A* sound. Again, the waking state of the soul, Vaishvanara, pervades all objects of the phenomenal world. From the macrocosmic standpoint, Vaishvanara is the gross manifestation of the universe. Therefore, *A*, the first letter of Aum, corresponds to the gross or the waking state, from the standpoint of both microcosm and macrocosm.

> The second measure, *U*, is Taijasa, whose sphere of activity is the dream state, on account of its superiority or on account of its being in the middle. He who knows this reaches the highest level of knowledge, becomes the same to all [enemies and friends], and in his family no one is born who is ignorant of Brahman.[6]

The sound *U* in Aum stands in the middle between *A* and *M*. It corresponds to the dream state, Taijasa, which also stands between the waking state and deep sleep. From the standpoint of the macrocosm, it corresponds to Prana or the universe of ideas, which stands

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

between the gross and the causal aspects of Reality. The subtle is superior to the gross. The dream state being composed of ideas, from the waking standpoint, is subtler than the waking state. Prana is also a name of the Cosmic Soul as endowed with activity.

> The third measure, *M*, is Prajna, whose sphere of activity is the state of deep sleep on account of its being the measure [*of the two other states*] or on account of its being the state of mergence [*of all things*]. He who knows this is able to realize the true secret of the universe and also becomes the substratum [*cause*] of all.[7]

M in Aum corresponds to the state of deep sleep of the individual or the causal state, Ishvara, of the universe. The sounds *A* and *U* finally merge in *M*. The waking and dream states merge in the state of deep sleep. The universe in its gross and subtle states finally merges in the causal state, or Ishvara (the Lord, who is the cause of the universe). The differentiated sounds of Aum come from and return into *M*. Our waking and dream experiences also emerge from and go back into the state of deep sleep. Deep sleep is the measure, as it were, of the other two states. In the same way, Ishvara is the measure of its gross and subtle manifestations.

When the sacred word Aum is uttered, *A* and *U* lose their separate identities and become one with *M*. Similarly, the experiences of the waking and the dream states lose their identities in Prajna, the state of deep sleep. In this state all experiences appear as one homogeneous experience—a state of bliss, but covered with ignorance. True knowledge consists in realizing the three states described above as one and identical with *Turiya,* or Pure Consciousness. *Turiya* is the substratum or the Ultimate Reality of the three states. The states, taken independently, are mere superimpositions on the Ultimate Reality. The foam, bubbles, and waves of the sea are, in reality, nothing but water. Water is the substratum and reality behind them. The different forms are illusory, the reality being water only. In the same way, the Ultimate Reality is Consciousness, which appears in various forms in the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. Yet the only Reality that persists in the three states is Consciousness alone.

On account of our ignorance, we look upon the three states

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

as independent of one another. Generally speaking, empirical science is applied to the waking state, idealistic philosophy to the dream state, and mysticism to deep sleep. On account of our ignorance, we find difference in these three branches of knowledge. But a knower of Supreme Reality finds one and same Consciousness in the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. If one meditates only on *A*, or the waking state, one gets knowledge of Vishva, the gross phenomenal world. By meditating on *U*, or the experiences of the dream state, one gets knowledge of Taijasa, the world of ideas. In the same way, by meditating on *M*, or deep sleep, one knows the secret of the cause. In all these three states the law of causality operates; the first two are strictly governed by the law of cause and effect, the third state by cause alone. But one who meditates on Aum as a whole—that is, not on any part—goes beyond causality, sees ultimate Truth everywhere, and thus escapes transmigration or the bondage of the phenomenal world.

> The Fourth is that which has no parts. It is intangible, the cessation of manifold experiences, and all-bliss. It is *Turiya*, Aum, and our very Self, free from duality. He who knows this merges his [phenomenal] self in his [real] Self.[8]

Aum looked at as a whole, and not from the standpoint of its parts, is without measure or quarters. It is transcendental Consciousness. It is *Turiya* and is beyond all precepts and concepts of the phenomenal world. As it transcends all the conceptions of symbols and the things signified by the symbols, it is indescribable. In it there is a complete cessation of manifold experiences. By realizing *Turiya*, the nondual, all-pervading Self, the seeker enjoys pure bliss. He is no longer deluded by the appearances of the phenomenal world, as he finds the Ultimate Reality in everything. As in the case of someone who mistakes a rope for a snake, he no longer sees the illusion (the snake) once he has realized the real nature of Reality (the rope).

But those sincere aspirants who have not yet realized this supreme wisdom should meditate on Aum with reference to its parts, and thus through the gradual illumination of their intellect they will ultimately realize *Turiya* or the Supreme Truth.

As Gaudapada wrote in his commentary on the *Mandukya*

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Upanishad: "[The meaning of] Aumkara should be known quarter by quarter. There is no doubt that the quarters are the same as the sounds [letters]. Having grasped the [meaning of] Aumkara, nothing else should be thought of."[9] Therefore, Aum should be meditated upon part by part. The parts of Aum and the quarters of the Atman are identical. By realizing the meaning of Aum as a whole, through its parts, one should not think of anything else, because there remains nothing else to be known by him.

For such a person the summum bonum of life has been attained, as Gaudapada continues: "The mind should be unified with [the sacred Syllable] Aum. [For] Aum is Brahman, the ever-fearless. He who is always unified with Aum knows no fear whatsoever."[10] Thus the mind should be on Aum. It is the Absolute, Brahman; by knowing it, one goes beyond fear and grief. For one so absorbed in the contemplation on Aum there is no fear whatsoever.

"Aum is verily the Lower Brahman, and it is also admitted to be the Supreme Brahman. Aum is without beginning [cause], unique, without anything outside itself, unrelated to any effect, and changeless."[11] Aum is the symbol of Apara Brahman (Reality associated with the phenomenal universe); it is, again, the Ultimate Reality or the Absolute. Nothing exists beside it. There is nothing outside itself. It exists everywhere like salt in the water of the ocean. It is the constant witness of the changing phenomena of the universe.

"Aum is verily the beginning, middle, and end of all. Knowing Aum as such, one, without doubt, attains immediately to that [the Supreme Reality]."[12] Everything originated from Aum, is sustained by it, and ultimately merges in it. As a magician, without undergoing any change in himself, conjures up a magic elephant; as a rope, without undergoing any change in itself, appears as a snake; as a desert, without undergoing any change in itself, appears as a mirage—so also the sacred syllable Aum, without undergoing any change in itself, appears to have become the manifold universe. By realizing Aum as such, one becomes unified with it.

"Know Aum to be Isvara, ever present in the minds of all;the man of discrimination realizing Aum as all-pervading does not grieve."[13] The sacred syllable Aum is the Ishvara (Pure Consciousness) present in the mind, which is the seat of all memory and perception, of all things. The person of discrimination, realizing Aum

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

as all-pervading like the sky, that is, knowing it as the Atman, not bound by the law of transmigration, goes beyond all grief, which results from the limitations of multiplicity and duality; and therefore the knower of the all-pervading Aum transcends all grief and sorrow.

"One who has known Aum, which is soundless and of infinite sounds, and which is ever-peaceful on account of negation of duality, is the [real] sage and none other."[14] The soundless Aum signifies *Turiya,* the all-pervading Self. It is called soundless, or immeasurable, because it is infinite and all-pervading. There is no way of determining its extension or measure by pointing to this or that. It is ever-peaceful and all-bliss on account of its being the negation of all duality and multiplicity. One who has realized the true nature of the sacred syllable Aum alone knows the true nature of the Supreme Reality. Only such a person is considered a sage, and none other.

Om as a Universal Symbol

The sacred word Om is the most universal of all symbols of the Ultimate Reality. Vedanta maintains that the Ultimate Reality is our inmost Self and is to be realized through one-pointed meditation on It. Such meditation has been compared to the unbroken flow of oil when poured from one container into another. Steps to this meditation are purification of mind through the practice of austerity and continence, repeated hearing about the Inmost Self from a knower of Self, and reflection on what has been heard. The sacred texts declare that the Ultimate Reality is beyond all thoughts and concepts, while meditation requires concentration on something definite.

How, then, should a seeker meditate on the Self? In answer to this question, the scriptures of Vedanta allude to the necessity of symbols. One cannot speak of anything without using a symbol. Even our thoughts are symbolic. The symbol is the reminder of truth. A seeker conscious of his body and mind cannot dispense with the use of symbols.

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of symbols: image symbols and word symbols. Certain objects—such as the cross, the crescent, fire, the temple, the church, the mosque, and the synagogue—are image symbols, as are the many visual representations of the Godhead. Image symbols evoke thoughts of God in the mind of the seeker because of their holy associations.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The same is the case with regard to word symbols. There are certain words, phrases, syllables, and sentences that, because of their long association with holy thoughts, are charged with holiness. When uttered in a particular way, these words rouse the seeker's spiritual consciousness. In this sense, all prayers are word symbols. (There is also a third variety of symbols, represented by geometrical figures, which serve as supports for the mind in the practice of concentration and meditation.)

The sacred word Om comes under the category of word symbols, but it also is considered an image symbol when depicted in Sanskrit characters.

Among the various symbols of different traditions, Om is unique because of its universal character. No other symbol represents all the different aspects of the Godhead in one image or sound. Vedanta maintains that the sacred word Om is all-inclusive and can be used by adherents of any religion, because it is that symbol which includes all thoughts and concepts of God ever imaginable by the human mind. As a symbol, Om stands for the Ultimate Reality as absolute Pure Consciousness and also as the Personal God of diverse forms. The Vedic seers envisioned the sacred Om as the essence of everything. It is more than a symbol; it is the Supreme Reality Itself. As Swami Vivekananda says: "Repeating Om is the only true worship. It is not a word; it is God Himself."[15]

Link between Om and Brahman

The sacred word Om is considered one with Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, and also the medium connecting human beings and God. In the language of theism, Om is God and also an aid to realizing God.

Om is constituted of three letters, *A, U, M,* and it is pronounced to rhyme with the English word *home.* It may be compared to the Word in Christianity, the Sanskrit Vak, or the Greek Logos, from which the creative process began. The Vedas say: "Vak, or the Word, is Brahman and is coextensive with Brahman. All is made by Vak, and all that was made was also by Vak."[16] Vedanta upholds the doctrine of Sphota in order to explain the process of creation. According to the seers of Vedanta, creation is a manifestation of the universe as names and forms. The form is the outer shell, of which the name or idea is the inner essence. The universe perceived by our

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

five senses is the form behind which stands the eternal, inexpressible Sphota, the essence of all form and name, designated by the Vedic seers as the Word, and the Word is Om.

Swami Vivekananda says:

> This eternal Sphota, the essential and eternal material of all ideas or names, is the power through which the Lord creates the universe. Nay, the Lord first becomes conditioned as the Sphota and then evolves Himself as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This Sphota has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is Om. And as we can by no possible means of analysis separate the word from the idea, Om and the eternal Sphota are inseparable; and therefore it is out of this holiest of all holy words, the mother of all names and forms, the eternal Om, that the whole universe may be supposed to have been created.
>
> But it may be said that, although thought and word are inseparable, yet as there may be various word-symbols for the same thought, it is not necessary that this particular word Om should be the word representative of the thought out of which the universe has become manifested. To this objection we reply that this Om is the only possible symbol which covers the whole ground, and there is none other like it. The Sphota is the material of all words; yet it is not any definite word in its fully formed state. That is to say, if all the peculiarities which distinguish one word from another be removed, then what remains will be the Sphota. Therefore this Sphota is called the Nada-Brahman, the Sound-Brahman. Now, as every word-symbol intended to express the inexpressible Sphota will so particularize it that it will no longer be the Sphota, that symbol which particularizes it the least and at the same time most approximately expresses its nature will be the truest symbol thereof. This is Om, and Om only, because these three letters—AUM—pronounced in combination as Om, may well be the generalized symbol of all possible sounds. The letter *A* is the least differentiated of all sounds; therefore Krishna says in the *Gita*, 'I am *A* among the letters.' Again, all articulate

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

sounds are produced in the space within the mouth, beginning with the root of the tongue and ending in the lips. The throat sound is *A*, and *M* is the last lip sound, and *U* exactly represents the rolling forward of the impulse, which begins at the root of the tongue and ends in the lips. If properly pronounced, this Om will represent the whole phenomenon of sound production; and no other word can do this. This, therefore, is the fittest symbol of the Sphota, which is the real meaning of Om. And as the symbol can never be separated from the thing signified, Om and the Sphota are one. Furthermore, as the Sphota, being the finer side of the manifested universe, is nearer to God and is indeed the first manifestation of Divine Wisdom, this Om is the true symbol of God.

Again, just as the non-dual Brahman, the Akhanda Satchidananda, the undivided Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, can be conceived by imperfect human souls only from particular standpoints and associated with particular qualities, so this universe, Its body, has also to be thought of according to the particular trend of the thinker's mind. This direction of the worshipper's mind is guided by its prevailing elements, or tattvas. As a result, the same Reality will be seen in various manifestations as the possessor of various predominant qualities, and the same universe will appear full of manifold forms. Even as in the case of the least differentiated and most universal symbol Om, thought and sound-symbol are seen to be inseparably associated with each other, so also this law of their inseparable association applies to the many differentiated views of God and the universe. Each of them, therefore, must have a particular word-symbol to express it. These word-symbols, evolved out of the deepest spiritual perceptions of sages, symbolize and express as nearly as possible the particular view of God and the universe they stand for. As Om represents the Akhanda, the undifferentiated Brahman, so the others represent the khanda, or differentiated views of the same Being; and they are all helpful to divine meditation and the acquisition of true knowledge.[17]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Further, Om as Nada-Brahman, or Sound-Brahman, is not a mere concept. The scriptures of Yoga and Vedanta maintain that the sacred word Om is constantly vibrating throughout the universe and that it becomes audible when one's mind is purified through long and steady spiritual practice and self-control. The sound of Om is called *anahata-dhvani,* the uninterrupted sound of the spheres. Sri Ramakrishna says that the *anahata*

> is a spontaneous sound constantly going on by itself. It is the sound of Pranava, Om. It originates in the Supreme Brahman and is heard by yogis. People immersed in worldliness do not hear it....
>
> The sound Om is Brahman. The rishis and sages practiced austerity to realize that Sound-Brahman. After attaining perfection one hears the sound of this eternal Word rising spontaneously from the navel. 'What will you gain,' some sages ask, 'by merely hearing this sound?' You hear the roar of the ocean from a distance. By following the roar you can reach the ocean. As long as there is the roar, there must also be the ocean. By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol.[18]

The doctrine of Sphota, as upheld by Vedanta, finds its echo in the Logos doctrine of Christianity. The Vedic statements, "In the beginning Prajapati, or the Lord of Creation, alone existed; He alone was this universe; He had Vak as His own and as second to Him, and Vak, or the Word, was verily the Supreme Brahman,"[19] sound almost identical with the statements in the Gospel of John in the New Testament: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[20]

There is, however, an important element of difference between the doctrine of Logos and the doctrine of Sphota. The early Greeks regarded Logos as a physical element. Later Heraclitus substituted intelligence for the idea of a physical element, while with Plato, Logos came to be regarded as an "idea" or a "thought" in God. The Stoics perceived this Logos as reason immanent in the universe. Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher and contemporary of Jesus, sought to harmonize Stoic reason with the transcendentalism of Plato, and regarded Logos not only as immanent in the universe but also as

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

transcendent. Logos, according to him, is the first manifestation of God. The author of the Gospel of John accepted the conception of Philo but gave it a new expression by saying that Logos, which is identical with God, and through which the universe was created, was "made flesh" in Jesus Christ.

While the Logos of Christianity was incarnate once, in the person of Jesus, the Sphota of Vedanta is incarnate in all beings and things of the universe. That is the essential difference between the two doctrines.

Om as the Seed Mantra of All Mantras

Om is the most sacred of all sacred words; it is the seed mantra, or mystic syllable of all syllables. By chanting the sacred word Om and meditating on its meaning, many seekers have crossed the tempestuous sea of the mind and reached the shore of immortality. In Sanskrit characters, Om has three parts: the main character, a crescent at the top, and a dot above the crescent. The *Shiva Purana* describes the glory of the sacred word Om:

> The syllable Om, also known as the Pranava, means an excellent boat to cross the ocean of worldly existence. Pra means Prakriti, or the world evolved out of it, and navam means an excellent boat. Also Pranava means "there is no world for you" or "that which leads to salvation." Further, it means that which leads to new knowledge of the pure Self. Pranava is twofold: the short and the long. The short one is of a single syllable, where the constituent parts of Om are not differentiated clearly when pronounced. The long one is of five syllables, where all the constituent parts are manifest. The five syllables are A, U, M, bindu [a dot, the basis from which emanated the first principle of creation supposed to be connected with Supreme Brahman], and Nada [the gong-like sound of Om].... The Pranava is to be used in the beginning of *vyahritis* [utterances of the syllables Bhur, Bhuvar, Svah (earth, heaven, interspaces)], in mantras, in the beginning of the recitation of the Vedas, and during prayer at dawn and dusk—along with bindu and Nada. If a seeker repeats it 90,000,000 times he becomes

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

pure.... A seeker who is able to complete 1,080,000 repetitions of the Pranava becomes fully enlightened.[21]

Om and the Hindu Trinity

The sacred word Om or Aum stands for the three worlds that we experience in the three states of our existence, and it also represents the trinity of Hinduism.

As mentioned above, the letter *A* stands for the gross world we perceive in the waking state, *U* for the subtle world of the dream state, and *M* for the causal world as a mass of consciousness we perceive in the state of deep sleep. Further, *A* stands for Brahma the creator; *U* for Vishnu the preserver; and *M* for Shiva, into whom the whole world is reabsorbed at the time of dissolution. In its undifferentiated aspect, Om stands for absolute Reality. Its pronunciation is characterized by a resonant gong-like sound.

In the music of the bagpipe there are two kinds of notes: one is a continuous monotone and the other is full of variations. The monotone is the substratum, as it were, of the variations. Om represents the two aspects of reality. When the word is split into *A, U, M,* it produces the illusion of creation, preservation, and dissolution. Then it stands for a Personal God. But when not split up, it is like the monotone of the bagpipe, the transcendental note on which all variations depend. Om is like the ocean and its waves: the waves are seen only on the surface, and below the waves is the mass of waveless water. Again Om is like the mind-stuff and the dream experiences, the content of which is also the mind-stuff.

Om as the Fulfiller of All Desires

The Vedantic seers maintain that all desires of the heart are fulfilled through the repetition of and contemplation on Om. The symbol of Cosmic Consciousness, Om is the storehouse of infinite energy and power; through repetition of and meditation on Om one attains to everything. It is claimed that even physical illness can be cured by the repetition of this sacred word, not to mention overcoming the disturbances of the mind. By one's repeating Om and contemplating its meaning, all obstacles in the path of meditation are overcome.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Om as Indicator of Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman

The sacred word Om is the indicator of both Saguna Brahman (Brahman with attributes) and Nirguna Brahman (Brahman devoid of all attributes).

The scriptures of Vedanta make a distinction between meditation *(dhyana)* with the support of a symbol and right apprehension *(nididhyasana)*. Right apprehension is direct and immediate knowledge of Brahman, while meditation is unbroken concentration on Brahman. Right apprehension of an object is determined by fact, whereas apprehension of an object in meditation is indirect and depends on the seeker's mind, faith, and will. Meditation is recommended for those seekers who are not able to practice right apprehension. Such seekers are guided more by faith than by reason. Vidyaranya in his *Panchadasi* says:

> It is possible to overcome the mental creation by means of meditation on attributeless Brahman, which again is gradually and easily acquired by meditation on Brahman with associates....
>
> The same idea is fully explained in the *Atma Gita*, which enjoins meditation on the attributeless Brahman on those who are unable to discriminate between Self and non-Self.[22]

Depending on his fitness, the seeker may practice meditation on Saguna Brahman or on Nirguna Brahman. In both cases some symbol of the Ultimate is used to hold the mind: the symbol that is recommended for use in the practice of meditation on the attributeless Brahman is Om. Though Vedantic texts mention several other symbols for meditation on the attributeless Brahman, such as the mind, the sky, the sun, and words like *tat* ("That") and *sat* (Reality), nonetheless, Om is considered the greatest verbal symbol of both Nirguna and Saguna Brahman.

Shankaracharya, in his commentary on verse 5.1.1 of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, observes:

> Although the words Brahman, Atman, etc., are names of Brahman, yet on the authority of the Srutis [i.e., the Vedas]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> we know that Om is Its most intimate appellation. Therefore it is the best means for the realisation of Brahman. It is so in two ways—as a symbol and as a name. As a symbol: Just as the image of Vishnu or any other god is regarded as identical with that god (for the purposes of worship), so is Om to be treated as Brahman.[23]

All prayer, contemplation, and meditation merge in Om, and Om finally merges in the silence of samadhi. As Sri Ramakrishna says: "The *sandhya* [ceremonial prayer] merges in the Gayatri [the concentrated prayer of the Vedas], the Gayatri in Om, and Om in *samadhi*."[24]

Om in the Vedas and Upanishads

Om is the most sacred word of the Vedas and the Upanishads. The *Katha Upanishad* designates Om as Brahman:

> The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is Om. This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires. This is the best support; this is the highest support. Whosoever knows this support is adored in the world of Brahma.[25]

The *Mundaka Upanishad* exhorts us to meditate on Om as the means to Self-Knowledge:

> Om is the bow; the atman is the arrow; Brahman is said to be the mark. It is to be struck by an undistracted mind. Then the atman becomes one with Brahman, as the arrow with the target.... He [the individual self] moves about, becoming manifold, within the heart, where the arteries meet, like the spokes fastened in the nave of a chariot wheel. Meditate on Atman as Om. Hail to you! May you cross beyond the sea of darkness.[26]

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* describes the meaning of meditation on Om:

> The [visible] form of fire, while it lies latent in its source [the firewood], is not perceived; yet there is no destruction

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

of its subtle form. That very fire can be brought out again by means of [persistent] rubbing of the wood, its source. In like manner, Atman, which exists in two states, like fire, can be grasped in this very body by means of Om. By making the body the lower piece of wood, and Om the upper piece, and through the practice of the friction of meditation, one perceives the luminous Self, hidden like the fire in the wood.[27]

The *Prasna Upanishad* indicates that Om serves as a support for meditation on both Saguna and Nirguna Brahman:

Then Satyakama, the son of Sibi, asked Pippalada: Sir, if among men someone should here meditate on the syllable Aum until death, which world, verily, would he win thereby? He replied: O Satyakama, the syllable Aum is the Supreme Brahman and also the other Brahman. Therefore he who knows it attains, with its support, the one or the other. If he meditates on one letter [*A*], then, being enlightened by that alone, he quickly comes back to earth after death. The *rik* [*Rig Veda*] verses lead him to the world of men. By practicing austerity, chastity, and faith he enjoys greatness. If, again, he meditates on the second letter [*U*], he attains the mind and is led up by the *yajur* verses to the intermediate space, to the Plane of the Moon. Having enjoyed greatness in the Plane of the Moon, he returns hither again. Again, he who meditates on the Highest Person through this syllable Aum consisting of three letters, becomes united with the effulgent sun. As a snake is freed from its skin, even so he is freed from sin. He is led up by the *sama* verses to the World of Brahma. From this, which is the aggregate of all lives, he beholds the Supreme Purusha, higher than the High and pervading all bodies. As to this there are these two verses: (1) The three letters of Aum [if employed separately] are mortal; but when joined together in meditation on the total Reality and used properly on the activities of the external, internal, and intermediate states, the knower trembles not. (2) The wise man, meditating on Aum, attains this world by means of the *rik*

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

verses; the intermediate world by means of the *yajur* verses; and that which is known to the seers by means of the *sama* verses. And also through the syllable Aum he realizes that which is tranquil, free from decay, death, and fear, and which is the Highest.[28]

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* regards Om as infinite:

Om. Infinite is That [Supreme Brahman], infinite is this [conditioned Brahman, or the visible universe]. From the Infinite [Brahman] proceeds the infinite. [After the realization of the Great Identity or after the cosmic dissolution], when the infinity of the infinite [universe] merges [in the Infinite Brahman], there remains the Infinite [Brahman] alone. Om is the Akasa Brahman—the primeval akasa [the Supreme Self]. [It is] the akasa containing air, says the son of Kauravayani. It [Om] is the Veda—thus the knowers of Brahman know; [for] through it one knows what is to be known.[29]

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* offers a prayer to Om and describes its use:

May he (Om) who is the bull (i.e. the foremost) of the Vedic hymns, who assumes all forms [Om pervades all words], who has sprung from the immortal hymns of the Vedas—may that Indra (the Lord) cheer me with wisdom (medha). O God, may I be the possessor of immortality! May my body be competent [to acquire Self-Knowledge]; may my tongue be exceedingly sweet; may I hear abundantly with my ears. Thou (Om) art the sheath of Brahman, concealed by [worldly] intelligence. Guard for me what I have learnt....

Om is Brahman. Om is all this. This syllable Om is used to indicate compliance. When they [i.e. the priests] are told: "Om, recite," they recite. Uttering Om, they sing the Saman chants. With "Om, Som," they recite the prayers. Uttering Om, the adhvaryu priest gives the response. Uttering Om, the Brahma [priest] gives assent. Uttering Om, [a qualified priest] gives permission to offer oblations in the Agnihotra sacrifice. When a Vedic teacher wishes to obtain Brahman

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

he utters Om; thus desiring Brahman, he verily obtains Brahman.[30]

The *Chhandogya Upanishad* emphasizes that Om is the origin of all speech:

> Prajapati brooded on the worlds. From them, thus brooded upon, there was revealed [in His heart] the threefold knowledge [*Sama Veda*, *Rig Veda*, and *Yajur Veda*]. He brooded on it, and from it, thus brooded upon, there issued forth these syllables: Bhur, Bhuvah, and Svah. He brooded on them (the three syllables), and from them, thus brooded upon, there issued forth Om. As all leaves are held together by a midrib, so is all speech held together by Om (Brahman). Om is all this, yea, Om is all this.[31]

Om in the *Bhagavad Gita*

The *Bhagavad Gita* in several places describes the syllable Om as the very embodiment of the Supreme Godhead. Lord Krishna says:

> I am the savour of waters, O son of Kunti, the radiance of the sun and moon; I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas, the sound in ether, the manliness in man.[32]

> I am the Father of this universe, the Mother, the Sustainer, and the Grandsire. I am the knowable, the purifier, and the syllable Om. I am also the Rik, the Saman, and the Yajus [that is, the Vedas].[33]

> Of the great rishis I am Bhrigu, and of words I am the monosyllable "Om." Of sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa; of immovable things I am the Himalaya.[34]

> He who closes all the doors of the senses, confines the mind within the heart, draws the prana into the head, and engages in the practice of yoga, uttering Om, the single syllable denoting Brahman, and meditates on Me—he who so departs, leaving the body, attains the Supreme Goal.[35]

> "Om Tat Sat"—this has been declared as the threefold designation of Brahman. By means of it were created, at the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

beginning, the Brahmins, the Vedas, and the Sacrifices. Therefore the acts of sacrifice, gift, and austerity, enjoined by the scriptures, are always begun by the followers of the Vedas with the utterance of "Om."[36]

Om as the Essence of All Mantras

Om is the essence of all sacred utterances. All the Vedic schools of thought, irrespective of their differences, accept Om as the highest symbol of the Ultimate. Also some non-Vedic schools consider it the most sacred of all words. For thousands of years it has been used by innumerable spiritual seekers in their prayer, meditation, and worship and various other spiritual practices. Om is thus more than a sacred word; it is the most sacred mantra or mystic syllable of the Vedas, containing within itself a concentration of great spiritual power.

When a sacred word or mystic syllable is repeated properly by a seeker (in the practice known as *japa*), it releases to that person the spiritual power that is inherent in it. A sacred word is sacred and pure because many seekers in the past repeated it, meditated on its meaning, and attained illumination. Om is such a sacred word. When a seeker repeats Om continuously and contemplates its meaning, his mind gets purified and his spiritual consciousnessis awakened.

As a seeker begins to repeat a sacred word, the sound and the thought of the word remain separate from each other. But as the repetition continues, eventually the sound becomes merged in the thought. To achieve the state of meditation at the beginning of practice is difficult. The mind, accustomed to dwelling on the level of body consciousness and on concrete ideas, cannot readily concentrate on the thought of the object of meditation, which is subtle. Moreover, it rebels against anything consistent. The methodology of meditation, on the other hand, has definite steps and procedures through which the mind is guided to the goal. Such steps and procedures, although they appear rigid and monotonous to the seeker, cannot be avoided. One's practice of meditation must at first be guided before it can become spontaneous. In this sense, the practice of *japa* is a great support for the practice of meditation.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Each mantra used in the practice of *japa* has its inherent power lying dormant. When a spiritually advanced soul repeats a mantra, it becomes charged with power and springs to life; and when such a person gives this mantra to another, the power is transmitted too. The power of such a living mantra is infallible. Each repetition of it is like a droplet of vibration that goes deep into our inner Consciousness and continues to vibrate in a molecular form even when the verbal repetition has stopped. Through continuous repetition for a long time, the entire mind is charged with the vibrations of this mantra, which fill the inner being with holiness and purity and soon bring about a perceptible transformation. The anonymous author of the Christian classic of mysticism called *The Cloud of Unknowing* writes:

> And therefore it is written, that short prayer pierceth heaven.... And why pierceth it heaven, this little short prayer of one little syllable? Surely because it is prayed with a full spirit, in the height and in the deepness, in the length and in the breadth of his spirit that prayeth it.... And therefore it is, to pray in the height and the deepness, the length and the breadth of our spirit. And that not in many words, but in a little word of one syllable.[37]

The sacred word Om is the shortest possible word recommended by the seers of the Upanishads for the practice of worship and meditation.

Furthermore, the *Mahanarayana Upanishad* describes Om as the essence of the Gayatri mantra: "The one syllable 'Om' is Brahman. Agni is its Deity. Its Rishi also is Brahman. Its meter is *gayatri.* Its use is for the union with Paramatman, who exists as the manifold universe."[38]

That is, the very form of the syllable Om is Brahman; that which is denoted by it is also Brahman, here designated as Agni (Fire); its seer is Brahman; its meter is *gayatri;* and its use is to aid an aspirant to realize his oneness with the Supreme.

> Om Earth. Om Sky. Om Heaven. Om Middle Region. Om Place of Birth. Om Mansion of the Blessed. Om Abode of Truth. Om may we meditate on the Adorable Light of that Divine Generator who quickens our understanding. Om He

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

is water, light, flavour, ambrosia, and also the three worlds. He who is denoted by pranava is all these.[39]

The above verse from the *Mahanarayana Upanishad* gives the mantras that are repeated (in Sanskrit) mentally for concentration during the performance of *pranayama.* According to Manu, these mantras are to be repeated mentally and concentrated upon while the breath is retained. During the retention of the breath, the nostrils are closed with the thumb and the little and ring fingers. When a seeker performs *pranayama* and concentrates his thought on these mantras, the dormant spiritual consciousness in the depth of his being is awakened, and he becomes fit for communion with the Supreme Self. The Gayatri mantra with Om added before it is uttered during the performance of *japa, homa,* and meditation. The seeker is not considered ready for any such spiritual practice unless he has first purified himself by the practice of *pranayama.* This *pranayama,* which is practiced during twilight devotions, differs from the one described by Patanjali in his *Yoga Aphorisms* for the practice of Yoga. While in the *pranayama* prescribed by Manu the period of the retention of breath is measured by the repetition of the mantras described above, in the case of the *pranayama* prescribed by Patanjali there are three aspects: breathing in, retention of breath, and breathing out—and all three are appropriately measured.

Four verses of the *Chhandogya Upanishad* hint at the fact that Om is the essence of the Gayatri mantra:

> Prajapati brooded over the worlds; from them, thus brooded over, he squeezed the essences: *agni* (fire) from the earth, *vayu* (air) from the mid-region, and *aditya* (the sun) from heaven. He brooded over these three deities; from them, thus brooded over, he squeezed the essences. The Rik-verses from fire; the Yajus-verses from the air, and the Saman-verses from the sun. He brooded over the threefold knowledge (i.e., the three Vedas); from them, thus brooded over, he squeezed the essences. Bhur from the Rik-verses, Bhuvah from the Yajus-verses, and Svah from the Saman-verses.[40]

The sacred word Om is the seed mantra indicative of Supreme Brahman, the undivided and undifferentiated Pure Consciousness.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

As such, all other mantras or mystic syllables, denoting specific aspects of the Supreme Godhead, are derived from Om and are differentiated forms of Om only.

The Beginning of All Worship

All rituals and ceremonies, invocations and prayers begin with the utterance of the sacred word Om. The *Bhagavad Gita* says:

> Therefore the acts of sacrifice, gift, and austerity, enjoined by the scriptures, are always begun by the followers of the Vedas with the utterance of Om. And with the utterance of *Tat*, and without seeking any recompense, are the various acts of sacrifice, austerity, and gift performed by those who seek liberation. The word *Sat* is used to denote reality and goodness; and likewise, O Partha, the word *Sat* is used for an auspicious action. Steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity, and gift is also called *Sat;* and so too is any action connected therewith. Whatever sacrifice or gift is made, whatever austerity is practiced, whatever ceremony is observed—it is all called "non-existent," if it is done without faith. It is of no account here or hereafter.[41]

Thus the seeker utters the sacred words Om *Tat Sat,* the triple epithet of Brahman, when performing any worship, making any gift, practicing austerity, or performing any sacrificial rite, so that any defect or deficiency in such acts may be overcome. In other words, imperfectly performed acts of sacrifice, austerity, gift, and worship are made perfect by the utterance, with faith, of the words Om *Tat Sat.* Patanjali designates Om as the indicator, or *vachaka,* of the Supreme Godhead: "The word that manifests Him is Om."[42] The word *vachaka* means a special kind of indicator, the repetition of which has the power to awaken the seeker's dormant spiritual consciousness by removing the veils of ignorance and delusion from his mind. Patanjali says: "The repetition of this (Om) and meditating on its meaning [is the way]."[43] That is, the repetition of the sacred word Om, combined with meditation on its meaning, is the way to Self-Knowledge. "From that is gained introspection and the destruction of obstacles."[44] That is, the first manifestation of the repetition of Om and meditation on its meaning is rising of the introspective power

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

within us. As this power manifests more and more, all the mental and physical obstacles which separate the individual self from the Supreme Self begin to vanish.

Patanjali maintains that repetition of the sacred word Om must be accompanied by meditation on its meaning. The two must go together. Mere mechanical repetition of Om without meditation on its meaning does not produce the desired results. About this the *Chhandogya Upanishad* points out that he who simply pronounces the syllable Om as a part of his recitation, and he who knows the real meaning of Om, both may perform the same worship; but the worship done with knowledge, faith, and meditation produces the more powerful result.[45]

Purification of the Mind

Repetition of a sacred word is the most potent means to transform and purify the mind. From the purification of the mind arises clarity of vision. Other ways of purifying the mind, according to the texts of Vedanta, are moral observances, unselfish activities, charity, the practice of austerities, keeping holy company, ceremonial worship, right performance of duties, and various forms of penance. But none of these is as effective as the verbal or mental repetition of a sacred word along with meditation on its meaning. Methods such as penance and austerities cannot root out the cause of sin, which is ignorance. They only purge the conscious level of the mind. They cannot penetrate the subconscious level in which the subtle impressions of the impure thoughts and desires are embedded.

Purification of the mind is like cleansing an inkwell permanently fixed on a table. Since the inkwell cannot be removed from the table, it can be cleaned only by pouring fresh water into it. As the water is poured into it continuously, all the impurities automatically come out of it. Persistent and systematic repetition of a sacred word is like the pouring of the fresh water. The vibrations of such repetition go deep into the mind and cleanse it of impurities.

According to the theory of mantras, the sense-perceived world of matter consists of vibrations of energy. A material object is nothing but the most condensed form of vibrating energy. The subtlest of all vibrations is the sound-form of the Ultimate Reality, and that sound, according to the Vedantic seers, is Om. The Sanskrit

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

word for sound is *sabda,* which stands for both sound and word. When one hears the sound of a word, it is only the gross form of the sound, called *vaikhari,* produced by the vocal cords. Beyond *vaikhari* lies the sound known as *madhyama,* produced by the thinking process. Beyond *madhyama* lies the thought itself, known as *pasyanti* sound, and beyond *pasyanti* is the Nada-Brahman, or Cosmic Sound.

Following the trail of this sound, the seeker attains first the spiritual awareness of his Chosen Ideal, then spiritual vision of It, and later, by transcending all sound and form, union with It. Explaining the necessity of the repetition of a sacred word, Swami Vivekananda observes:

> Why should there be repetition? We have not forgotten the theory of *samskaras:* that the sum total of impressions lives in the mind. They may become more and more latent, but they remain there, and as soon as they get the right stimulus, they come out. Atomic vibration never ceases. When this universe is destroyed, all the massive vibrations disappear; the sun, moon, stars, and earth melt down; but the vibrations remain in the atoms. Each atom performs the same function as the big worlds do. So even when the vibrations of the *chitta* [mind-stuff] subside, its atomic vibrations go on; and when they get the impulse, they come out again. We can now understand what is meant by repetition. It is the greatest stimulus that can be given to the spiritual *samskaras.* "One moment of company with the holy builds a ship to cross this ocean of life"—such is the power of association. So this repetition of Om and thinking of its meaning are the same as having good company in your mind. Study and then meditate on what you have studied. Thus light will come to you; the Self will become manifest. But one must think of Om and of its meaning too. Avoid evil company, because the scars of old wounds are in you and evil company is just the thing necessary to call them out. In the same way, we are told that good company will call out the good impressions which are in us but have become latent. There is nothing holier

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

in the world than to keep good company, because the good impressions will then tend to come to the surface.[46]

Types of Seekers

Vedanta classifies seekers into three groups: superior, mediocre, and inferior. The superior seekers are instructed to practice not meditation but "right apprehension," as explained earlier. It is not meditating on the Self as Brahman, but realizing It as Brahman by negating all limitations that are superimposed on It through ignorance This is like perceiving the stump of a tree as a stump and not anything else.

Sureshvara in his *Naishkarmya Siddhi* maintains that right apprehension or direct knowledge is different from meditation.[47] Knowledge gained through meditation is indirect. Direct knowledge is dependent on fact, indirect knowledge on the seeker's mental process. The practice of meditation is recommended for the less qualified (or mediocre) seekers who are incapable of right apprehension. In meditation the seeker is instructed to meditate on the individual Self as Brahman with the support of the repetition of the sacred word Om. As he repeats the sacred word Om, keeping his mind fixed on his inmost Self, his mind gets purified and attains to the realization that his inner Self is identical with the all-pervading Supreme Self or Brahman. Such a mediocre type of seeker is instructed to repeat Om as the supporting practice for his meditation. Shankara regards Om as the supreme means to the realization of Brahman.[48]

For seekers below the mediocre level, Vedanta advises practicing meditation on Brahman by superimposing divine attributes on It with the help of the sacred word Om. In such meditation Om is regarded as both an auditory and a visual symbol of Brahman. For those who find this meditation difficult, Vedanta prescribes meditation on some specific aspect or form of the all-pervading Divine as Ishtam, or Chosen Deity. The seeker in such a case may choose to meditate on the form of a Divine Incarnation. He is asked to look upon his chosen form as a focus of the Supreme Self.

Success in the higher form of meditation is never achieved unless the seeker has become established in the lower stages of meditation. Meditation on some specific aspect of the Supreme Godhead, such as Shiva, Vishnu, or Kali, or on a Divine Incarnation,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

eventually leads to the realization of the all-pervading Divine beyond all form and attribute. Sri Krishna, in the *Uddhava Gita,* teaches the practice of meditation by stages, beginning with concentration on the form of the Ishtam and culminating in the realization of oneness with the Pure Self as Brahman, and says:

> The man of self-control should withdraw the organs from the sense-objects with the help of the mind, and with the intellect as guide direct the mind to My entire form. Then one should concentrate that mind—distributed all over My body—on one part, and think of the smiling countenance alone and nothing else. Drawing the mind which is concentrated on that, one should fix it on the Supreme Cause. Then leaving that too, one should rest on Me [as Pure Self] and think of nothing whatsoever [the meditator then becomes united with the object of meditation]. With one's mind thus absorbed, one sees Me alone in oneself and sees oneself united to Me, the Self of all—like light united to light. A yogi who thus concentrates his mind through intense meditation will soon extinguish the delusion about objects, finite knowledge, and action [that is, the entire realm of relativity, the apparent manifold].[49]

As a rule the first step in meditation is *rupa-dhyana,* concentrating the mind on the form of the Ishtam. The second step is *guna-dhyana,* meditation on the Ishtam as the embodiment of all bliss, knowledge, purity, and love. The third and last step is *svarupa-dhyana,* meditation on the real nature of the Ishtam, which is all-pervading Pure Consciousness. The first step leads to the second and the second to the third.

Vedanta offers different modes of worship to different seekers in keeping with their respective mental capacities. A sacred text of Vedanta says: "Worshipping the idol is the first step; better than this is repetition of a holy Name and singing of divine glories. Better still is *dhyana,* or contemplation, and the last and highest is to realize 'I am He.'"[50] Again, in another text: "The highest spiritual discipline is the practice of Brahman consciousness. The next is meditation. Chanting of hymns and repetition of the divine Name form the third step. The lowest is external worship with the help of an image."[51]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The goal of Vedanta is to raise the seeker from where he is. His spiritual growth must be in conformity with his psychophysical fitness and constitution. Such growth is an organic growth that cannot be hurried or artificially stimulated. It is an evolution of consciousness unfolding itself naturally. While the ultimate goal of all seekers remains the same, approaches to this goal vary because of the varieties of human temperaments. An individual's spiritual perception and assimilation depend upon his mental capacity and constitution.

The point is illustrated by a story in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:*

> Gods, men, and demons [that is, three types of men—godly, human, and ungodly], all descendants of Prajapati, the Creator Brahma—went to Him for instruction and lived a life of austerity and self-control for a number of years. On the completion of their term of spiritual austerities, the gods approached Prajapati. "Kindly instruct us, Sir," they said. Prajapati uttered the syllable "Da," and said to them, "Have you understood?" They replied, "Yes, we have. You tell us: 'Damayata—be self-controlled.'" "Yes, you have understood," said Prajapati. Next the men approached Him and said, "Kindly instruct us, Sir." Prajapati uttered the same syllable "Da," and said to them, "Have you understood?" They replied, "Yes, we have. You tell us: 'Datta—be charitable.'" "Yes, you have understood," said Prajapati. Then the demons approached Him and said, "Kindly instruct us, Sir." Prajapati uttered the same syllable "Da," and said to them, "Have you understood?" They replied, "Yes, we have. You tell us: 'Dayadhvam—be compassionate.'" "Yes, you have understood," said Prajapati. It is said that even today the heavenly voice thunders from the clouds: "Da! Da! Da!—Be self-controlled! Be charitable! Be compassionate!"[52]

The meaning of the above is as follows:

The three moral ideals of self-control, charity, and compassion are intended for three different grades of men. The cruel should practice non-injury and strive to be compassionate; the greedy should overcome greediness by charity;

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

and those who are free from other vices but still have sense desires, should particularly practice inner control. In this context Shankaracharya remarks: "Those among men who, though lacking in self-control, are possessed of other good qualities are the gods; those in whom greed prevails are men; while those who are cruel and violent are the demons [*asuras*, lit., the ungodly]."[53]

The essence of the teaching is that a seeker's assimilation of spiritual instruction depends on his inner nature and his inner nature on his inner evolution. Our spiritual search has to begin from where we are.

Vedanta maintains that meditation is not needed by one who knows Brahman and, again, meditation is not possible for one who does not know Brahman. Practice of meditation is for those who have not yet attained the direct knowledge of Brahman but, at the same time, are not altogether ignorant of Brahman. As seekers they begin their journey with indirect knowledge of the oneness of their inner self and Brahman, the all-pervading Self, based on their study of scriptures and reasoning. Meditation on that which has been indirectly known eventually leads them to direct realization of Brahman.

While all the schools of Vedanta agree that Self-Knowledge is indispensably necessary for liberation, some among them do not support the view that Self-inquiry is the only means to Self-Knowledge. They maintain that constant meditation on the Self is also the way to liberation. Of the two paths, Self-inquiry and meditation, the former is considered direct and the latter indirect. The way of meditation is regarded by some as a hit-or-miss attempt that happens to succeed. The text *Dhyana-dipa* compares contemplation to a delusion which culminates in a fruitful result.[54] According to this view, both the light of a lamp and the light of a gem may be mistaken for a gem. Although both ideas are wrong inferences, a person who mistakes the lamp light for the gem and approaches the place that the light comes from does not get any gem, whereas one who mistakes the light of the gem for the gem itself obtains the precious object. In the latter case, the person's getting the gem does not make his prior inference about the presence of the gem valid. Thus, a seeker begins his journey in ignorance but ends it with Knowledge.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

15. Meditation on the Gayatri Mantra

The traditions and scriptures of Vedanta consider the Gayatri to be the most sacred of all mantras. A mantra is a specific combination of letters or words which has hidden within it a mysterious power to bring about certain results on being used in a particular manner. Each such mantra has a meter, a presiding deity, and a seer to whom it was revealed and who attained supreme realization by meditating on it.

The use of a mantra, in order to be effective, must be in keeping with orthodox rules and practices. That is to say, the mantra must be repeated or chanted according to its specific meter and rhythm, while one is meditating on the deity represented by it and establishing a mental connection with the seer of the mantra. Such repetition and meditation release the inherent power of the mantra, and this power brings about the desired transformation of consciousness in the seeker.

As a mantra is repeated or chanted, a sound vibration representing the mantra is produced within. Meter and rhythm play an important part in producing this sound vibration. Steady and continuous repetition creates a stream of vibrations that makes the whole mind of the seeker resonate with the rhythm of the mantra. Repetition is employed because the manifested universe is made of vibrations. The so-called solid, liquid, and gaseous objects are but vibrations concretized into different forms. Our body and mind also are vibrations of energy.

By consciously producing vibrations of purity and holiness, the mind attains purity and holiness. Such attainment is certain even

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

when the repetition or chanting is mechanical or without full knowledge of the science of meter and rhythm. Just as a person who mechanically follows the exact formula for preparing a chemical compound obtains that compound, without having any knowledge of chemistry, similarly a seeker attains the result of repetition of a mantra by following the rules and observances, even though he may not know their meaning and significance.

The presiding deity of the mantra is also known as the Ishtadevata, a particular manifestation of the Supreme Self who bestows fulfillment and also the power necessary for maintaining that realization. If such mantras are translated into other languages, their sound structures would change and they would thereby lose their efficacy. Thus the effectiveness of a mantra depends upon the power inherent in its sound structure.

A mantra acquires added power when it is imparted to a pupil by a knower of truth as teacher. The teacher in such a case awakens the dormant power of the mantra *(mantra-chaitanya)* by his own power. The Gayatri mantra is that most potent mantra, the essence of all mantras, and it acquires added power when it is imparted to a seeker by a competent teacher. It embodies in itself mystically all the meters and all the seers of all other mantras and their presiding deities, as well as the glory of those deities. By invoking the Gayatri, all these are invoked in oneself. By the repetition of this mantra, every sacred mantra is repeated, and by meditation on it, all the deities are meditated upon.

Meaning of the Gayatri Mantra

The Gayatri mantra occurs in the *Rig Veda* (111.62.10.) and reads as follows in Sanskrit:

OM. BHUR BHUVAH SWAH;
TAT SAVITUR-VARENYAM
BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHI;
DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYAT. OM.

The English translation reads: "Om. We meditate on the radiance of that Supreme Divine Being, the creator of the world planes—earth, heaven, and those spaces in between. May that Divine Being direct our intelligence. Om."

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The word-for-word meaning of the Gayatri mantra is as follows: *yo* (who), *nah* (our), *dhiyo* (intellect), *prachodayat* (direct), *tat* (that), *devasya* (of the effulgent or radiant), *savitur* (of the creator), *varenyam* (supreme), *bhargo* (light), *dhimahi* (meditate), Om. *Bhur-bhuvah-swah* (Om. Earth, heaven, and the spaces in between).

The word *tat* qualifying *savitur* makes it clear that the sun, the visible luminary in the sky, is the representation of the Supreme Godhead. The Godhead is described as *savitur* because He is self-luminous. He is the light of all lights. All other light, whether physical, intellectual, or spiritual, is derived from that Divine Light. The seeker meditates on the *bhargo,* or light of the Godhead, because it is the light of absolute reality. The reality of everything in the relative universe is derived from it. The term *bhargo* also means to burn. The light that is meditated upon is not merely an illuminator; it is the fire of knowledge that completely destroys all ignorance and delusion and leads to the direct realization of the Supreme.

According to the sage Sayana, the word-for-word meaning of the Gayatri mantra is: *savitur* (of that indwelling controller and director), *devasya* (radiant being), *varenyam* (supreme), *tat* and *bhargo* (that effulgence), *dhimahi* (we meditate), *yo* (who), *nah* (our), *dhiyo* (intellect), *prachodayat* (direct, stimulate entirely [to the realization of the Truth]). Sayana's full translation is: "We meditate on that supreme effulgence of the Radiant Being, the indwelling controller and director of all beings. May He stimulate our intellect entirely (to realize the Truth)."[1]

When meditating on the Gayatri mantra, the seeker is instructed to direct his attention to the radiant light of the sun. From this he is led to meditate on the source of the light of perception and understanding within, without which one cannot perceive the light of the sun. In the final stage, he is asked to meditate on the identity of the light in him and the light of the sun—the identity of the Pure Consciousness of his inner Self and the all-pervading Pure Consciousness of the universal Self.

Gayatri, Savitri, and Sarasvati

The presiding deity of Gayatri has the form of three goddesses: Gayatri, Savitri, and Sarasvati. Therefore the Gayatri mantra is also

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

called the Savitri mantra or the Sarasvati mantra. The Supreme Godhead as the Ultimate Reality is represented by Gayatri, while the same Godhead as the inner controller of all beings and things is known as Savitri. Through this Savitri mantra, the Supreme Being, the inmost Self of all beings, is invoked and worshipped. Sarasvati represents the stream of knowledge of the Eternal. The Vedas are compared to a lake *(saras)* that gives the waters of life, and the Gayatri, in the form of Sarasvati, is the essence of the Vedas.

The Gayatri mantra begins with Om and also ends with Om. The efficacy of the Gayatri mantra, making use of the Om, in drawing the mind upward cannot be overstated. The traditions of Vedanta maintain that when Om is uttered verbally or mentally, the impulse of the mind flows upward from the throat toward the crown of the head. It is said that during the twenty-four hours of the day and night, an individual soul is unconsciously repeating *japa* of Om in the form of So'ham, or "I am He." The repetition has been designated as *ajapa gayatri,* or unceasing repetition of the Gayatri.

The Gayatri mantra is also a potent prayer. A prayer is made of words, and its efficacy depends only on the thoughts and emotions it evokes, not upon the sounds produced by it. As a prayer, the mantra is addressed to the infinite Divine Being, the source of the manifested universe, for enlightenment of the understanding. It is a prayer for spiritual illumination that dispels the darkness of delusion and ignorance. As physical light enables us to see physical objects through visual perception, and mental light helps us to comprehend ideas, so spiritual light endows us with the capacity to realize the spiritual reality, which cannot be perceived by the senses and mind.

Prayer is a supplication of the individual soul to the Supreme Self for union. An object cannot long remain separated from its source. The yearning of the individual soul for union with the Supreme Self, its source, is called spiritual aspiration, and that aspiration is expressed through prayer. The response to such prayer is always proportionate to our sincerity, earnestness, and humility in offering the prayer. No earnest prayer ever goes unanswered. In the same way, each fervent utterance of the Gayatri as a prayer is a call of the individual soul to the all-pervading Supreme Self, the very

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

source of its being, and such a call cannot go unanswered. Thus the Gayatri, combining within itself the power of a prayer and the power of a mantra, is a doubly sacred and effective instrument for the awakening and unfoldment of our spiritual consciousness.

The Gayatri Meter

The sacred texts of Vedanta have extolled the Gayatri in various ways. In the *Bhagavad Gita,* Sri Krishna says: "Of meters I am the Gayatri."[2] (Here the word *gayatri* means the Vedic meter of twenty-four syllables as well as the Gayatri verse repeated daily by every brahmin at the time of his regular devotions.) In the chapter entitled "Meditation on the Gayatri," the *Chhandogya Upanishad* states: "The Gayatri is everything, whatever here exists. Speech is verily the Gayatri, for speech sings forth *(gaya-ti)* and protects *(traya-te)* everything, whatever here exists."[3]

That is, the Gayatri meter, containing the minimum of letters, is present in all other meters; therefore it is the foremost among meters. One cannot conceive of an object without a name. Therefore name, which is the same as speech, is everything. Thus the Gayatri and speech are not different from each other. They are also etymologically the same. Speech sings forth an object, that is to say, gives it a name. It also protects others from fear by pointing out the name of the object and exhorting them to give up fear. Speech is able to perform these two functions because it is one with the Gayatri. Again from the *Chhandogya Upanishad:*

> That Gayatri is also the earth; for everything that exists here rests on this earth and does not go beyond. In man, that Gayatri is also the body; for the pranas exist in this body and do not go beyond. That body, in man, is again the heart within a man; for the pranas exist in it and do not go beyond.[4]

The word *pranas* in the verse means both the five vital breaths and the sense organs. It also means the *bhutas,* or elements. The Gayatri and the body are not different from each other, because like the Gayatri, the body contains the *pranas,* or elements. Moreover:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> That Gayatri has four feet and is sixfold. The same is also declared by a Rik-verse: "Such is its greatness [i.e., of Brahman as known through the symbol of the Gayatri]. Greater than it is the Person [Brahman]. One of Its feet covers all beings; the immortal three feet are in heaven [i.e., in Itself].[5]

The "four feet" in this verse of the *Chhandogya Upanishad* refer to the four quarters of the Gayatri meter, each consisting of six letters or syllables. The Gayatri, being identified with all creatures, and with speech, earth, body, heart, and the *pranas,* is called "sixfold." The word "Person" denotes the Pure Brahman, which fills all things or which lies in the body. One foot of the Gayatri Brahman covers the universe; such is its greatness. The word "immortal" here means immutable. That three of its feet are in heaven denotes that the Pure Brahman is greater than the Gayatri. Brahman is, in reality, devoid of parts. It is changeless and immortal. The idea that a part of It has become the universe is *maya,* illusion. "Heaven" here refers to Brahman's glory.

The next verse explains that the same Brahman which is meditated upon through the *upadhi* (limitation) of the Gayatri is also meditated upon as dwelling in the heart:

> The Brahman which has been thus described [as immortal, with three feet in heaven, and as the Gayatri] is the same as the [physical] akasa or space outside a person. The akasa which is outside a person is the same as that which is inside a person. The akasa which is inside a person is the akasa within the heart. The akasa which is within the heart is omnipresent [not limited by the heart] and unchanging [not subject to change, and therefore imperishable]. He who knows this obtains full and unchanging prosperity.[6]

The indirect fruit of the Knowledge of Brahman is described in the text. The direct and important result is liberation while dwelling in the body.

The Gayatri mantra begins with the Pranava or Om, identifying Om as the essence of Gayatri. It also ends with Om, because Om is the culmination of all Gayatri. Sir John Woodroffe, a British scholar

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

of Indian philosophy, described the meaning and significance of the Gayatri mantra in his book *The Garland of Letters:*

> The mantra opens and ends with the *pranava* or Om. This refers in the first place to the threefold aspect of the World-Cause in manifestation. That there is a cause (Mahashakti) which, as the Universal Self, contains the universe within Itself, is dealt with in the meditation which follows. Here both the Cause and Its manifestation are the object of thought. The Nadabindu (source of the sound Om) indicates that causal state of the World-Power, prior to its threefold differentiation as represented by the letters "A," "U," "M," which coalesce into Om. These letters stand for its working which is observable by all. For the first and second refer to present activities, as well as those in the past and future, of the Mahashakti, as the Radical Vital Potential. "M" or Rudra as so observed is chemical action breaking down the combinations of matter. This is the disintegration of form. "A" (Brahma) is the force which creates it anew by its ever rejuvenescent molecular activity, thus rescuing organized vitality from the processes which are ever at work to consume (as "M") its forms. "U" (Vishnu) is the maintaining power which stabilizes matter, which is only a relatively stable condition of energy, from which it appears, and into which it, at length, merges. Looking at the sum total of manifested energy, Vishnu as Maintainer, through space and time, is a theological statement of the doctrine of the general conservation of energy. The Mahashakti, in Herself Perfect Consciousness (Chidrupini), is the threefold Powers of Will, Knowledge and Action, and manifests in the building up, maintenance and disintegration of forms. What follows, as all else, is contained in Om, but some of its implications are developed in the rest of the Gayatri mantra. Om considered as a sound (Dhvani) is the approximate natural name of the first undifferentiated movement (Samanya-Spanda) of the stressing material cause (Prakriti) of the universe. The primordial "Sound" or Stress is the primordial functioning of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the Brahma-Shakti. Then follow the three Vyahritis—Bhur, Bhuvah, Svah, which are Lakshana of, that is, stand for, all the fourteen Lokas, though now in this (Vyavaharika) world we are only concerned with the first three; Bhur for Bhur and the seven nether Talas (hells), Bhuvah for itself, and Svah for Svah and the remaining upper regions (heavens) up to Satya. The Lokas represent states of consciousness. Bhurloka or earth is the state of normal experience. The Lokas above it are states of supernormal consciousness, and the Talas below are conditions of subnormal experience. Objectively considered matter becomes more and more dense as one descends from the highest to the lowest Loka and thence to the Talas; and as the veil of matter is more or less dense, so the state of consciousness varies. The first five Lokas, from and including Earth, are those of the five forms of sensible matter, the sixth is that of Mind; and the seventh is the causal state of both Mind and Matter. Earth and the nether states are the gross body, the Lokas from Bhuvah to Tapah are the subtle body, and Satya is the causal body of the great Purusha referred to in the Gayatri and worshipped in the Sun circle (Adityamandala). The Vyahritis indicate that the Great Self which is indicated in Om pervades all the regions of the universe.[7]

The Gayatri and Its Parts

The Gayatri mantra has three parts. The first part consists of the *pranava* (Om) and the *mahavyahritis* (Bhur, Bhuvah, Svah), indicating the three world planes (earth, heaven, and the spaces in between). The second part is *Tat savitur varenyam, bhargo devasya dhimahi,* and the third part is *Dhiyo yo nah prachodayat.* As the Gayatri is chanted by a seeker, its first part rouses within him the power that helps him to attune his inner self to the Supreme Self,the all-pervading Pure Consciousness. The second part stimulates his mind with an intense longing to come into contact with the all-pervading Pure Consciousness, and the third part brings about the total surrender of his inner self to the Supreme Self. Every individual soul, being a focus of the all-pervading Supreme Self, contains

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

within itself, in a potential form, all the powers that are fully manifest in the Supreme Self.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* describes meditation on Brahman conditioned by the Gayatri, or using the Gayatri as the symbol of Brahman. The Gayatri meter is the chief of all meters, and the Gayatri mantra protects the organs of those who chant it. The Gayatri mantra is designated as identical with the vital breath, because the vital breath protects the body by healing wounds. As vital breath, the Gayatri is the support of the universe and in it all beings, all the Vedas, and all rites, together with their results, are unified.

In addition, meditation on the Gayatri mantra is significant for another reason. According to the caste rules of Hindu society, a brahmin is qualified for the study of the Vedas, the performance of Vedic rituals, and the pursuit of Self-Knowledge. But a brahmin is regarded, at the time of his birth, as a *shudra* (person of low caste). It is only when he is invested with the sacred thread that he is considered to have had his second birth and to have become a true brahmin. Hence he is also called twice-born (*dvija*). At the time of his second birth he is taught the sacred Gayatri mantra, which he chants regularly thereafter.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* describes Gayatri as comprising the three world planes, the three Vedas *(Rig, Yajur,* and *Sama)*, and the three forms of the vital breath (*prana,* or the breath that goes upward; *apana,* or the breath that goes downward; and *vyana,* or the breath that spreads all through the body). The Gayatri, consisting of words only, has three feet. The fourth foot, which is subtle, is in the sun. The knower of Gayatri becomes identified with the Gayatri and has fire for his mouth, which consumes all sins. As fire burns up all fuel that is put into it, so also a knower of Gayatri, even if he commits a great many sins, consumes them all and becomes pure, thus overcoming decay and death.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* describes the three feet of Gayatri:

> The words *Bhumi* (earth), *Antariksha* (sky), and *Dyaus* (heaven) form eight syllables, and the first foot of the Gayatri consists of eight syllables. So the three worlds constitute the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

first foot of the Gayatri. Whosoever knows this about the [first] foot of the Gayatri wins all that is in the three worlds.

Richah, Yajumshi, and *Samani* [these three words are the plural forms of the names of the three Vedas] form eight syllables, and the second foot of the Gayatri consists of eight syllables. So these [three] Vedas constitute the second foot of the Gayatri. Whosoever thus knows the second foot of the Gayatri wins as much as that treasury of knowledge, the three Vedas, has to confer.

Prana, apana, and *vyana* form eight syllables, and the third foot of the Gayatri consists of eight syllables. So these [three] forms of the vital breath constitute the third foot of the Gayatri. Whosoever knows this about the third foot of the Gayatri wins all the living beings that are in the universe.

Now, its *Turiya*, [apparently] visible *(darsata)* and supramundane *(paroraja)* foot is this—the sun that glows yonder. That which is fourth is called *Turiya*. He (the being in the solar orb) is [apparently] visible *(darsata)* because he is seen, as it were [by the yogis]. He is supramundane *(paroraja)*, because he shines alone on the whole universe as its overlord. He who thus knows the fourth foot of the Gayatri shines with splendor and glory.

That Gayatri rests on that fourth, [apparently] visible, supramundane foot. And that, again, rests on truth. The eye is truth, for the eye is indeed truth. Therefore, even today, if two persons come disputing, one saying: "I saw it," and another: "I heard of it," we should trust the one who says: "I saw it."

That truth rests on strength. The vital breath *(prana)* is strength. Hence truth rests on the vital breath. Therefore they say that strength is more powerful than truth.

Thus the Gayatri is based on the vital breath within the body. That Gayatri protected the *gayas*. The organs are the *gayas;* therefore the Gayatri protected *(tatre)* the organs. Because it protected the organs, it is called the Gayatri. The Savitri [verse], which the teacher communicates to the pupil, is no other than this. It saves the organs of the pupil to whom it is imparted by the teacher.[8]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Divine Mother of Mantras

Although Gayatri is both an indicator of Brahman and not different from Brahman, the all-pervading Supreme Self, dwelling as the inmost Self of all beings, the tradition of Vedanta looks upon it as representing the motherhood of the Divine through whose grace seekers attain to Self-Knowledge. Regarding this motherhood, Woodroffe states:

> Man always anthropomorphises. In the West he calls the Creator the Father. More aptly Supreme Creative Being in the East and by the Shaktas is called the Mother, for this power conceives in Its Womb, which is Consciousness, gives birth to and nourishes, the Universe. The first Mantra into which a child is initiated is Ma or Mother, for that is its first word, and Mother is often the last word on the lips of the dying. Reverence to the natural Mother is reverence to the Mother of all and they who in life and at death drink the milk of that Mother attain to Her. Moreover in the world the Mother-aspect of Her who is Brahman is alone fully manifested. What She is in Herself (Svarupa) is not known to mind or senses. The *Yoginihridaya Tantra* says: "What man knows the heart of a woman? Only Shiva knows the Heart of Yogini." This is the Cosmic Heart of the universe whose systole and diastole is the going forth and return of millions of worlds. This process Brahmanism calls Pravritti and Nivritti, and Taoism (which is perhaps a Chinese adaptation of the doctrine of the Upanishads) names it Yang and Yin. Relatively to man's knowledge the Supreme Power is said to be in Itself Being (Sat), Consciousness (Chit) and Bliss (Ananda). The Primordial Power or Adya Shakti is inconceivably beyond manifested personality, for this is limited experience hedged in by mind and matter. Though not in Itself a Person as we understand that term, It is ever personalizing in the form of all individual (Vyashti) things in the world. It is also a Person as the aggregate (Samashti) of all such personalities. Whilst infinite, it contains in Itself the sum of all human and other experience. Whilst the Power (Mahashakti) is in Itself beyond mind and senses in

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

that darkness (as man thinks it to be) which is the body of Mahakali, its manifestations are seen. It is with reference to such manifestation inferred to be the Radical Vital Potential which is, as it were, the thread (Sutratma) of the whole series of beings, which form one Vital Continuity, a principle on which Indian Monistic philosophy is based. Nothing has an absolute commencement or end. All is transformed. Birth and death are modes thereof. Each existence is, as it were, a knot tied in an infinite rope, which knot is made at birth and untied at death. Something does not come from nothing, and something never becomes nothing. An absolute beginning or end is inconceivable. Particular universes come into being and go. Birth, life and death are modes of the universal transformation governing all organic life "from a blade of grass to Brahma Himself." The divine infinitude is ever such, but appears as limited function and its effects, and as apparently discontinuous, because of the limitation of the senses which perceive its workings. The whole fact is never present to consciousness, but only that section to which pragmatic attention is for the moment given, and which therefore appears localised and in succession of time. Nevertheless there is an infinite Vital Continuity stretching from the Radical Potential to its actualisation as the crust of matter, which is but an infinitesimal portion of the effect produced by the function of Substance relative to the whole universal efficiency. For ether (Akasha) is more continuous than matter which is but the outer crust of the Central Power. Ether is continuous and all-pervading and is said to be more than a thousand times denser than gross ponderable matter. The visible earth is therefore but a microscopic point evolved by the Vital Power (Shakti) of substance (Shiva) in the midst of the invisible, perpetually active, but in its own nature (Svarupa) unaffected Divine Substance pervading all space. Therein nothing truly exists independently of another, but all are transformations of the one Power. And as that Power is Itself vital and creative, its products or rather transformations of Itself are that.[9]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The worship of God as Mother is a special feature of the Tantra, a system of religious philosophy that traces its origin to the Vedas. Tantra has greatly influenced the spiritual practices of Vedanta. According to Vedanta, the Ultimate Reality is Brahman and It is undifferentiated, infinite Pure Consciousness. Any perception of diversity is an illusion. Tantra, on the other hand, maintains that Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is not just actionless, motionless, undifferentiated Pure Consciousness. It is Shiva-Shakti. As Shiva It is actionless, motionless Pure Consciousness, and as Shakti It is ever in action. Tantra describes this Shakti aspect as Mother. Shiva and Shakti, Brahman and Its Power, are not different. The two are eternally joined, like a word and its meaning. One cannot be separated from the other. One is not complete without the other.

In the words of Sri Ramakrishna:

> Brahman and Sakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. When we talk of fire we automatically mean also its power to burn. Again, the fire's power to burn implies the fire itself. If you accept the one you must accept the other.[10]

> He who is attributeless also has attributes. He who is Brahman is also Sakti. When thought of as inactive, He is called Brahman, and when thought of as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, He is called the Primordial Energy, Kali.[11]

The Supreme Divine Power in Its static aspect is nameless, formless, motionless, and unmanifest. Again, the same Power, when It springs into manifestation and becomes dynamic, assumes countless forms and pervades the entire universe. For example, electricity in its unmanifest form within a dynamo or battery is inactive, motionless, and formless. But the same electricity, when made dynamic, manifests itself as light, motion, heat, cold, and sound, which are perceptible through the senses. This process of manifestation and nonmanifestation of the Supreme Divine Power has been described as the eternal outbreathing and inbreathing of Brahman.

As we saw in chapter 14, the dynamic manifestation of the Divine Power has three aspects, represented by the three letters *A*,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

U, M: creation *(A)*, preservation *(U)*, and dissolution *(M)*. The undifferentiated Absolute becomes differentiated into will *(ichchha)*, knowledge *(jnana)*, and action *(kriya)*. The three manifestations have also been referred to as Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra (Shiva). These three manifestations of the Divine Power are eternally operative. The gross universe comes into being from its unmanifested state, endures for a length of time, and again becomes unmanifest. The process of creation, conservation, and dissolution is ceaseless. As Brahma, the Divine Power is continually creating and re-creating elements out of the unmanifested substance; as Rudra, It is ever breaking down that which has been created; and as Vishnu, It acts to conserve the universe for a length of time by bringing the two forces of creation and destruction into equilibrium. All created things possess only relative stability. Matter itself is only a relatively stable form of energy, destined to return to its original state.

A sacred verse from the *Devi Mahatmyam,* repeated in adoration of the motherhood of the Ultimate Reality represented by Gayatri, runs as follows:

> You are Svaha [propitiatory mantra of the *devas,* or gods, uttered when an oblation is poured in the fire for them] and Svadha [propitiatory mantra of the *manes* or *pitris,* uttered when offerings are made in ceremonies in honor of departed ancestors]. You are verily the Vasatkara [signifying *yajna,* Vedic sacrifice] and the embodiment of Svara [Devi is herself the sacrifice and the heaven is the reward to be attained through the performance]. You are nectar [*sudha,* the food of the *devas,* signifying immortality]. O eternal and imperishable One, you are the embodiment of the threefold *mantra* [Omkara, consisting of A, U, and M]. You are half a *matra,** though eternal. You are verily that which cannot be uttered specifically. You are Savitri

*"Each time-unit is called a Matra. The twinkling of an eye is sometimes taken as the period of one Matra. Time occupied by one normal respiration is considered as one Matra. Time taken up in pronouncing the monosyllable OM is regarded as one Matra." (Swami Sivananda, *The Science of Pranayama* [Sivanandanagar, Tehri-Garhwal: Divine Life Society, 1971], p. 36).

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> [the famous Savitri hymn, which occurs in the *Rig Veda*] and the supreme Mother of the devas.[12]

Mention may be made in this context of a spiritual vision that Swami Vivekananda once had during his wandering days. The account of the vision, as recorded in his biography, is as follows:

> Once he [Swami Vivekananda] had a strange vision. He saw an old man standing on the bank of the Indus and chanting Riks, or Vedic hymns, in a distinctly different way from the accustomed methods of intonation of today. The passage which he heard was: "O come Thou Effulgent One, Thou Bestower of Blessings, Signifier of Brahman in three letters; Salutation be to Thee, O Gayatri, Mother of Vedic Mantras, Thou who hast sprung from Brahman." The Swami believed that through this vision he had recovered the musical cadences of the earliest Aryan. He also found some remarkable similarity to this in the poetry of Sankaracharya. Such a vision as this shows the extraordinary development of Yoga powers in the Swami.[13]

The presiding deity of Gayatri has three forms: it is Gayatri in the morning, Savitri at noon, and Sarasvati in the evening. The meaning of Gayatri is "that which protects the person who chants it from various sins." The name Savitri is given because it represents Savitar, or the orb of the sun, which illumines the creation. It is Sarasvati because in that aspect it expresses the world in the form of speech. As already indicated, the three forms of Gayatri are also known as Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra. The sacred texts further describe the form of Gayatri thus: Agni, or Fire, is its mouth; Brahma, the firstborn, is the head; Vishnu is the heart; and Rudra is the tuft of hair or flame causing the final dissolution of the universe; the earth is the source; the winds are the breath. It is fair in hue, indicating the highest purity. It is not different from Brahman. Gayatri has three feet of eight syllables each; six sheaths, or auxiliaries to the Vedas, which protect the Vedas, represented by Gayatri; five heads consisting of the four Vedas and the Purana, known as the fifth Veda.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The Gayatri in the Practice of *Pranayama*

According to Manu, the Gayatri is to be mentally repeated during the practice of *pranayama*. The form of the Gayatri as mentioned in the *Mahanarayana Upanishad* is:

> Om Earth. Om Sky. Om Heaven. Om Middle Region. Om Place of Birth. Om Mansion of the Blessed. Om Abode of Truth. Om may we meditate on the Adorable Light of that Divine Generator who quickens our understandings. Om he is water, light, flavour, ambrosia and also the three worlds. He who is denoted by *pranava* is all of these.[14]

In this form the Gayatri has four parts: (1) *pranava* or Om; (2) the *vyahritis* indicating seven regions or planes of existence; (3) the Gayatri proper; and (4) the Gayatri Sirah.

The First Part: *Pranava* or Om

The first part, *pranava* or Om, is the essence of the entire Gayatri, containing within itself the other three parts. The rest of the Gayatri mantra is an elaboration of the meaning of Om, which is uttered at the beginning of each part of the mantra. As the primordial sound, Om *(anahata)* is uninterruptedly going on in the universe. The aspirant can hear this sound within himself at a certain developed stage of concentration. The articulated sound produced by the utterance of the word Om is the acoustic manifestation of this eternal primordial sound. When uttered properly, Om or Aum is sounded from the navel with a deep rolling and continuous sound ending at the upper part of the nostrils, where the third letter, *M*, is sounded.

The Second Part: *Vyahritis* or Planes of Existence

The seven *vyahritis* denote the seven worlds.

> The first three of them are called Mahavyahritis. *Pranava* is added to each of them to point out that each *vyahriti* independently also stands for the Supreme. After the seven *vyahritis* the *gayatrimantra* follows them headed by another *pranava*, which again implies that the Supreme alone is denoted by the *gayatrimantra*. This is succeeded

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

by *gayatrisiras* bracketed by the *pranavas* in the beginning and the end. Gayatri coming in the middle is the fundamental element and the rest are auxiliaries thereof.[15]

The *vyahritis* indicate that the Supreme Self, designated by Om, pervades all the regions of the universe, both higher and lower. In meditation on the Gayatri, the aspirant's mind rises from the lowest plane to each successive higher plane of consciousness.

On the plane of earthly existence, things appear to us objectively, separate from and independent of the perceiver. As the aspirant reflects and discriminates, he discovers that the objective world is not really independent, but very much dependent on the consciousness of the perceiver, the subject. He gains a new vision and reaches the second stage of higher consciousness. In the third stage of higher consciousness, he comes to discover that the sense organs cannot perceive objects unless the mind, directed by the Self, is joined to them. Up to this point the Self, though the real perceiver, seems to be limited to the body and conditioned by the senses. On reaching the fourth stage of higher consciousness, he realizes that the Self is not conditioned by anything. It only appears to be limited, just as the infinite sky appears to be enclosed within a jar. In the fifth stage of higher consciousness, he realizes that the Self is the illuminating witness consciousness in all states of existence—wakeful, dream, and deep sleep. Reaching the sixth stage of higher consciousness, he perceives the Supreme Self as the only Reality, the external universe being Its dynamic manifestation. It is like seeing the same water of the ocean when it is still and again when it is in the form of countless waves.

When he reaches the seventh stage of higher consciousness, he perceives the world of myriad diversity merging into its Cause, the Supreme Self. The expansion of his inner consciousness, rising from the first to the seventh plane, culminates in his reaching the Great Cause, the Supreme Self, and the Gayatri mantra is the homage offered to that Self.

The Third and Fourth Parts

The third part of the Gayatri mantra is the Gayatri mantra proper: *Om tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi; dhiyo yo nah*

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

prachodayat (We meditate on the radiance of that divine Being. May that divine Being stimulate our intelligence). This part of the mantra describes the Supreme Self as Savitar, or the projector of the universe. All that we perceive through the senses is but the same Supreme Self externalized as something separate from us. The Self is the seer and the Self is the seen. All are Its varying forms, existing in harmony with It and reflecting Its light.

The fourth part of the mantra is called the Gayatri Sirah: *Om apo jyoti raso'mritam brahma bhur bhuvah svah Om.* (Om is the Waters, Light, Essence, the Immortal, Reality; Om is the physical, intermediate, and heaven worlds.) The fourth part is the natural conclusion of the third. The aspirant now perceives the Supreme Self everywhere and in everything. All things originate from that Supreme Self, endure for a length of time, and again return to It.

> When a person performs the *pranayama* and concentrates his thought on this mantra, the latent spiritual tendencies in the depth of his being are awakened and he becomes fit for communion with the Supreme Reality and eventually he realises the spiritual goal.[16]

The realization of the great Self as indicated by the Gayatri mantra is more than an intellectual understanding. It is a burning realization that has been tested by reason and felt as a direct experience. Such direct experience is so profound and powerful that it transforms the experiencer forever. Attainment of this experience calls for purification of the mind through prayer, worship, meditation, and spiritual austerities. The great Self, which is pure Truth, is never attained by a person who lacks purity.

The Gayatri is chanted during the performance of ritualistic worship, *japa,* fire sacrifice, *pranayama,* and meditation. In each case the mantra is repeated in its complete form. First the seeker utters the seven *vyahritis,* with Om added before each of them. After the utterance of the *vyahritis,* he repeats the Gayatri mantra itself, again adding Om in the beginning. Thereafter he utters the Gayatri Sirah, with Om in the beginning and Om at the end. When a seeker concentrates his mind on the Gayatri mantra, the dormant spiritual tendencies in the depth of his being are awakened, and he

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

is able to commune with the Supreme Self—the Self of all beings and things.

Stages of Meditation on the Gayatri

Ritualistic meditation on the Gayatri has four stages: symbolic purification of the body and mind and the environment; invocation of the Gayatri within the heart; repetition of the Gayatri mantra accompanied by meditation on its form and meaning; and concluding prayer.

Symbolic Purification of the Body and Mind and the Environment

The seeker invokes the Supreme Being (indicated by the Gayatri) within himself and thereby purifies himself and the surrounding environment. He imagines that his inner self is gradually rising to higher and higher states of consciousness and is finally being joined to the Supreme Self in the crown of his head, and that as it is rising, all the impurities within are being burned up. Thereafter he offers a prayer to the luminous sun. The light of the sun is thought of as the focus of the light of the Supreme Self, the Light of lights. By symbolic purification, the seeker detaches himself from all extraneous thoughts and raises a protective wall, so to speak, around himself.

Invocation of the Gayatri within the Heart

After symbolic purification and before meditation, the seeker addresses the Gayatri as the Divine Mother of the Universe and prays to Her to visit him and favor him with the knowledge of the Supreme Brahman, the ultimate goal of all worship, meditation, and austerity. This prayer, as mentioned in the *Mahanarayana Upanishad,* is the following:

> May the boon-conferring divine Gayatri come to us (in order to instruct us about) the imperishable Brahman who is determined by the Vedanta. May Gayatri, the mother of metres, favor us with the Supreme just mentioned.
>
> O Thou who art the source of all letters, O Thou great Deity, O Thou the object of meditation at twilight, O Thou Sarasvati, may Thy devotee be liberated from the sin which

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

he commits during the day by the same day and from the sin which he commits during the night by the same night.

O Gayatri, Thou art the essence of strength. Thou art patience or the subduing power. Thou art physical capacity. Thou art splendour. Thou art the abode of the gods and their names. Thou art the insentient universe. Thou art the full span of life or the Lord of all. Thou art every living thing. Thou art the life span of all. Thou art the vanquisher of all that is hostile to us. Thou art the Truth denoted by the *pranava.* I invoke Gayatri (in my heart). I invoke Savitri. I invoke Sarasvati. I invoke the metres, the Rishis (and the gods). I invoke the splendor (of all the gods). Of Gayatri the metre is *gayatri,* the Rishi is Visvamitra, and the Deity is Savitar. Fire represents the mouth; the four-faced Brahma, the head; Vishnu, the heart; Rudra, the crown hair; Earth, the source; the in-breath, the out-breath, the diffused breath, the up-breath, and the middle-breath, the breath. Gayatri is fair in hue and is of the same family as Paramatman attained by the Sankhyas—the illumined sages. The deity Gayatri (explained further as a formula) has twenty-four syllables, comprised in three feet, six sheaths or cavities, and five heads. It is employed in Upanayana or initiation into Vedic studentship.[17]

Another prayer to invoke the goddess Gayatri is the following:

Om. O Goddess, come with Thy showering boons. O Thou of three syllables, O Thou Revealer of Brahman, O Gayatri, mother of metres. O Thou source of the Vedas, salutations be to Thee.[18]

Repetition of the Gayatri Mantra Accompanied by Meditation on Its Form and Meaning

The seeker now begins repetition of the Gayatri and meditation on its meaning. Meditation on Gayatri is practiced three times each day—morning, midday, and evening. In keeping with these three times, the presiding deity of the Gayatri has been described by the sacred texts as having three forms. The morning form of the Gayatri

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

is radiant red as the rising sun, has deer hide for Her dress, and holds book and rosary in Her hands; She is the power of Brahman and is meditated upon while the stars still shine. The midday form is blue as the sky; She has four arms—holding conch, discus, club, and lotus—and is seated in the solar orb. The evening form is snow-white, in white garment, seated on a bull representing divine strength; She is three-eyed and holds in her hands boon, noose, lance, and drum. As the seeker repeats the Gayatri mantra, he visualizes within himself the form of the Gayatri in keeping with the time of day and meditates on the meaning of the mantra.

Meditation on the Gayatri has three stages. It begins with (a) meditation on the form *(rupa)* of the Gayatri. Meditation on the form, in the second stage, becomes (b) meditation on the divine qualities and glories *(gunas)* of the Gayatri. In the third and final stage, it is (c) meditation on the *svarupa,* or the real nature of the Gayatri, which is the Supreme Self or Pure Consciousness.

In his meditation, the seeker follows the upward movement of his inner consciousness and finally reaches that stage where his individual I-consciousness joins with the Universal I-consciousness, the first creative manifestation of the Supreme Self. The individual I-consciousness is nothing but a particularized reflection of the Universal I-consciousness. But this Universal I-consciousness cannot be reached unless the aspirant is able to free himself from the fetters of matter, gross and subtle. It requires one-pointed subjective penetration to pass through the layers of dense and fine matter and to reach the Pure Consciousness, of which all forms are the assertions.

This Pure Consciousness is the great Self of Vedanta, designated by the Upanishads as Brahman. It runs through all and unifies everything, giving to each its separate existence, yet summing them all up in its own being *(svarupa)*. The great Self has also been described as Knowledge-Existence-Bliss Absolute. The microcosm (individuality) is the finite form of the infinite macrocosm (the totality). A thing is not really known unless it is perceived as Brahman. Living beings appear conscious because of Brahman, the Absolute Consciousness. The universe appears to exist because of the Absolute Existence of Brahman. Brahman, again, is Bliss Absolute. It is this Bliss that manifests Itself as pure Love. Essentially, love is a

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

longing for oneness with Brahman, the Self of all. By realizing the Supreme Brahman, the infinite great Self, the aspirant attains the highest fulfillment of his finite existence.

Concluding Prayer

The aspirant concludes his meditation with a prayer, by which he offers all his thoughts, words, and actions to Brahman, the Supreme Self.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

16. Meditation on the Great Vedic Sayings

The spiritual seeker can select as his object of meditation one of the *mahavakyas*, known as the great sayings of the Vedas. Each *mahavakya* is a pithy sentence giving the very essence of the teachings of the Upanishads. The *mahavakyas* are four in number:

Prajnanam Brahma: Consciousness is Brahman.
Aham Brahmasmi: I am Brahman.
Ayam Atma Brahma: This Atman, or individual self, is Brahman.
Tat Tvam Asi: That Thou Art.

Prajnanam Brahma: Consciousness Is Brahman

The first *mahavakya* occurs in the *Aitareya Upanishad* of the *Rig Veda*. It is the indicator of *svarupa*, or the real nature of Ultimate Reality: Brahman is the Consciousness of all forms of manifested Consciousness. It is thus the Light of all lights. The verse states:

> He is [the conditioned] Brahman, He is Indra, He is Prajapati; He is all these gods; He is the five great elements—earth, air, akasa [ether], water, light; He is all these small creatures and the others which are mixed [with them]; He is the origin [of the moving and unmoving]—those born of an egg, of a womb, of sweat, and of a sprout; He is horses, cows, human beings, elephants—whatever breathes here, whether moving on legs or flying in the air or unmoving.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

All this is guided by Consciousness (Prajnanam), is supported by Consciousness. The basis [of the universe] is Consciousness. Consciousness is Brahman.[1]

The meaning of Consciousness in the verse is the following:

Brahman, or attributeless Pure Spirit—untainted, calm, self-content, non-dual, and transcendental—becomes, when conditioned by the limitations of name and form, the omniscient Lord (Isvara), the cause of the manifestation of the universe, where all created beings obtain their enjoyments. As the Inner Controller of all, It is called the Antaryamin. Being associated with the Cosmic Intelligence, which is the seed of the tangible universe, It is known as Hiranyagarbha; being conditioned by the totality of all bodies and born from the Cosmic Egg, It is known as Virat; being associated with the names of fire, speech, etc., It becomes the *devas*. Thus Brahman is known by different names and forms when associated with different bodies, ranging from the body of Brahma, the Creator, to that of an insect. That one Being, who is beyond all conditioning, is described in various ways by different thinkers as It is conceived by their minds.[2]

In the dialogue between King Janaka and the sage Yajnavalkya in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad,* Yajnavalkya points out that Brahman is self-luminous and eternal. But for the luminosity of the Supreme Self, the world would be dark. The light of the sun, of the moon and the stars, of the Milky Way—all these shine because of the light of the Supreme Self. Again, It is the light that remains ever-shining in all three states of human existence—waking, dream, and deep sleep.

"Yajnavalkya, what serves as light for a man?"

"The light of the sun, O Emperor," said Yajnavalkya, "for with the sun as light he sits, goes out, works, and returns."

"Just so, Yajnavalkya. When the sun has set, Yajnavalkya, what serves as light for a man?"

"The moon serves as his light, for with the moon as light he sits, goes out, works, and returns."

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

"Just so, Yajnavalkya. When the sun has set and the moon has set, Yajnavalkya, what serves as light for a man?"

"Fire serves as his light, for with fire as light he sits, goes out, works, and returns."

"Just so, Yajnavalkya. When the sun has set, Yajnavalkya, and the moon has set and the fire has gone out, what serves as light for a man?"

"Speech (sound) serves as his light, for with speech as light he sits, goes out, works, and returns. Therefore, Your Majesty, when one cannot see even one's own hand, yet when a sound is uttered, one can go there."

"Just so, Yajnavalkya. When the sun has set, Yajnavalkya, and the moon has set and the fire has gone out and speech has stopped, what serves as light for a man?"

"The self, indeed, is his light, for with the self as light he sits, goes out, works, and returns."[3]

Sankaracharya further explains:

In the waking state a man is helped in his movements by such lights as the sun, the moon, etc. Without light the body and senses cannot perform their functions. And this light is outside his body, which is an aggregate of different parts. But what serves as light for a man in dreams and in deep sleep? One cannot see dream objects without light. While dreaming, too, one meets friends, parts with them, and goes to different places—all with the help of some sort of light. From deep sleep, again, one awakes with the remembrance that one slept happily and knew nothing; this shows that some kind of light functions in deep sleep too. Therefore Janaka asked about the light which serves a man when the sun, the moon, etc, do not help him, that is to say, when he is asleep. Yajnavalkya's answer is that the self *(atman)* is the light that serves a man in all his activities, whether he is awake or dreaming or experiencing deep sleep. The self is different from the body and organs, and its light illumines all things, like the external light of the sun, moon and so on; but the self itself is not illumined by anything else. The self is inside the body, though separate

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> from it and from the organs. External lights such as the sun, moon, and fire are illumined by the light of the self. The Self, being non-material, is not perceived by the eye and other organs.[4]

Aham Brahmasmi: I Am Brahman

The second *mahavakya* is the indicator of direct realization of the identity of the individual Self and Brahman. The words "I am" in "I am Brahman" mean that my inmost Self and Brahman, the Supreme universal Self, are identical. Brahman as Atman remains hidden in the innermost recess of our heart. As Atman, Brahman is the eye of the eye, ear of the ear, speech of the speech, mind of the mind. The difference between Brahman and Atman is only in name and not in essence. Brahman and Atman are one and the same Reality. Self-Knowledge, the goal of all self-control and meditation, is the discovery and realization of this identity.

This *mahavakya* occurs in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* of the *Yajur Veda.* The verse runs as follows:

> This [self] was indeed Brahman in the beginning. It knew itself only as "I am Brahman." Therefore it became all. And whoever among the gods had this enlightenment, also became That [Brahman]. It is the same with the seers *(rishis)*, the same with men. The seer Vamadeva, having realized this [self] as That, came to know: "I was Manu and the sun." And to this day, whoever in a like manner knows the self as "I am Brahman," becomes all this [universe]. Even the gods cannot prevent his becoming this, for he has become their Self. Now if a man worships another deity, thinking: "He is one and I am another," he does not know. He is like an animal to the gods. As many animals serve a man, so does each man serve the gods. Even if one animal is taken away, it causes anguish [to the owner]; how much more so when many [are taken away]; therefore it is not pleasing to the gods that men should know this.[5]

By meditating on *"Aham Brahmasmi,"* "I am Brahman," the seeker realizes that the Atman, his inmost Self, is also Brahman, the Self of all, and as the knower of Brahman he becomes Brahman

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Itself. The seeker now identifies himself with all beings. Since he becomes the very Self of all beings, none can show hostility to him, because one cannot be hostile to one's own Self. Atman is the nearest of the near and dearest of the dear. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Yajnavalkya points out that when any person or thing is dear to us, it is so not because of the person or thing, but because of this Atman, the common inmost Self of all beings and things.[6] As immortal indwelling spirit, the Self alone is real: It alone exists. It is the Reality of all realities, Existence of all existences. Therefore the Self is dearer than anything else. "One should meditate upon this Self as dear. He who meditates upon the Self alone as dear—what he holds as dear will not perish."[7] The *Panchadasi* explains the message of Yajnavalkya with a number of illustrations:

> A wife seeks her husband when she has a desire for his company. But if the husband is affected by hunger, illness, etc., he has no desire for his wife's company. Therefore the wife loves her husband not for his sake but for her own. Similarly the husband loves his wife not for her sake but for his own satisfaction. The mutual loves of husband and wife are intended to gratify himself or herself and not the other. A child kissed by its father may cry with pain caused by the pricking of the father's bristly beard. The father continues kissing the child, not for the child's sake but for his own. Gems and wealth have neither likes nor dislikes; but a person owning them protects them with great care, not for their sake but for his own. (It never occurs to him that his love for wealth is in the interest of wealth.)... A person desires to go to heaven and Brahma's world, not to promote the well-being of those worlds but for his own enjoyment. Siva, Vishnu, and other deities are worshipped for the removal of the worshipper's sins. This worship is not for the sake of those deities, who are themselves sinless, but for the sake of the worshipper.[8]

The *mahavakya "Aham Brahmasmi"* indicates that Atman, the inmost Self, is none other than Brahman, the universal Self. Brahman is thus our true identity. The saying So'ham, meaning "I am

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

He," is really an answer to the question "Koham?" or "Who am I?" We cannot know others unless we know ourselves. Our knowledge of different things depends upon our knowledge of our individual Self because we perceive the world through the prism of our mind.

Self-Knowledge, or knowledge of Atman, is different from knowledge of the diversities. The latter is analytical and seeks to know things by breaking them apart, while the former is the knowledge that is attained by putting the broken pieces together again. Brahman, as Atman, is the Observer, Knower, and Enjoyer of everything. It is the ever-present witness consciousness within, which shines behind the three states of waking, dream, and dreamless sleep.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* describes Brahman as *Turiya*, the changeless, ever-present fourth dimension of our existence. Brahman is the Supreme Godhead. It has no particular form. As fire assumes the form of the thing it burns, so also Brahman assumes the form of the thing through which It manifests. The descriptions of the various names and forms of this Supreme Godhead in different sacred traditions and scriptures are feeble attempts of the human mind to attribute names and forms to that which is nameless and formless. The Upanishad says:

> In It which is indicated as the changeless and the Supreme Lord there is a cessation of all miseries. It is the one without a second, among all entities. It is known as the *Turiya* (the fourth), effulgent and all-pervading.... The Atman is imagined as *prana* (life force) and other endless objects. This is due to *maya* (ignorance) of the luminous (Atman Itself), by which It is (as it were) deluded. Those that know only *prana* call It (Atman) *prana;* those that know *bhutas* (the elements) call It *bhutas;* those knowing *gunas* (modifications of nature) call it *gunas;* those knowing *tattvas* (cosmic principles or categories) call It *tattvas.* Those acquainted with the quarters *(padas)* call It the quarters; those with objects, the objects; those with *lokas* (planes of existence), the *lokas;* those with *devas* (shining beings), the *devas.* Those knowing the Vedas call It the Vedas; those acquainted with the sacrifices *(yajna)* call It the sacrifices;

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

those conversant with the enjoyer designate It as the enjoyer, and those with the object of enjoyment call It such. The knowers of the subtle designate It as the subtle; the knowers of the gross call It the gross. Those that are familiar with a Personality (having form) call It a person; and those that do not believe in anything having a form call It a void. The knowers of time call It time; the knowers of space (ether) call It space. Those versed in disputation call It the problem in dispute; and the knowers of the worlds call It the worlds. The cognizers of the mind call It the mind; of the *buddhi* (intellect), the *buddhi;* of the *chitta* (mind-stuff), the *chitta;* and the knowers of *dharma* (righteousness) and *adharma* (unrighteousness) call It the one or the other. Some say that the Reality consists of twenty-five categories; others, of twenty-six; while there are others who conceive It as consisting of thirty-one categories; and lastly, people are not wanting who think such categories to be infinite. Those who know only how to please others call It (the Reality) such pleasure; those who are cognizant of the *asramas* (the four stages of life) call It the *asramas;* the grammarians call It the masculine, feminine, and neuter genders; and others know It as the Para and Apara (the Higher Brahman and the Lower Brahman). The knowers of creation call It creation; the knowers of dissolution describe It as dissolution; and the believers in subsistence believe It to be subsistence. Really speaking, all these ideas are always imagined in Atman.[9]

This nondual Brahman, perceived within as Atman, is the basis of all ethics and morality. By doing good to others, we only do good to ourselves. Sin is considered dark because it blocks the light of this Atman, our common Self, and thus separates us from others. The practice of virtue is considered purifying because it dispels that darkness. Spiritual practices do not create or produce Self-Knowledge; they only enable us to perceive the ever-luminous Self within by cleansing the doors of our perception. In this Atman we are all united, though we are diverse and different from one another in our bodies and minds.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Brahman as the Indweller, Atman, receives our worship, listens to our prayer, and fulfills our desires. As Swami Vivekananda says:

> No books, no scriptures, no science, can ever imagine the glory of the Self, which appears as man—the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists, or ever will exist. I am to worship, therefore, none but my Self. "I worship my Self," says the Advaitist. "To whom shall I bow down? I salute my Self. To whom shall I go for help? Who can help me, the one Infinite Being of the universe?" Do not dream these foolish dreams. Who ever helped anyone? None. Whenever you see a weak man, a dualist, weeping and wailing for help from somewhere above the skies, it is because he does not know that the skies also are in him. He wants help from the skies, and the help comes. We see that it comes; but it comes from within, and he mistakenly thinks it comes from without. It is as when, sometimes, a sick man lying on his bed hears a tap on the door. He gets up and opens it and finds no one there. He goes back to bed, and again he hears a tap. He gets up and opens the door. Nobody is there. At last he finds that it was his own heart-beat, which he fancied to be a knock at the door. Thus man, after this vain search for various gods outside himself, completes the circle and comes back to the point from which he started—the human soul; and he finds that the God whom he was searching for over hill and dale, whom he was seeking in every brook, in every temple, in every church, the God whom he was even imagining as sitting in heaven and ruling the world, is his own Self. I am He, and He is I. None but I was God; this little I never existed.[10]

Direct perception of the indwelling Brahman is the goal of all spiritual quest. Prayers and austerities, penances and self-control, pilgrimages and charity, only purify the mind, and in the mirror of the purified mind the luminous and all-pervading Brahman becomes revealed. It is only through such a revelation that a mortal becomes

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

immortal, that the knots of his heart are cut asunder forever and he overcomes grief and sorrow. As Shankaracharya says:

> Let people quote the scriptures and sacrifice to the gods, let them perform rituals and worship the deities, but there is no liberation without the realization of one's identity with the Atman, no, not even in the lifetime of a hundred Brahmas put together [a span of time almost endless from the human point of view].[11]

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says:

> The non-dual and resplendent Lord is hidden in all beings. All-pervading, the inmost Self of all creatures, the impeller to actions, abiding in all things, He is the Witness, the Animator, and the Absolute, free from *gunas*. There is a non-dual Ruler of the actionless many; He makes the one seed manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves—and not to others. He is the Eternal among the eternal, the Conscious among the conscious, and though non-dual, fulfils the desires of many. He who has known Him, the luminous Lord, the Great Cause, to be realized by Samkhya (Knowledge) and yoga, is freed from all fetters.... In this universe the Swan (the Supreme Self) alone exists. It is He who, as fire, abides in the water [the body or the heart]. Only by knowing Him does one pass over death. There is no other way to reach [the Supreme Goal].[12]

Ayam Atma Brahma: This Atman Is Brahman

"Ayam Atma Brahma," which occurs in the *Mandukya Upanishad* of the *Atharva Veda,* signifies that the self-luminous, all-pervading Brahman is directly experienced as the inmost Self of all beings. The all-pervading Self and the indwelling Self are identical.

The verse is: "All this is, indeed, Brahman. This Atman is Brahman. This same Atman has four quarters *(padas)*."[13] The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* describes the heart as Brahman:

> Prajapati [the Creator God] is this—the heart (intellect). It (the heart) is Brahman. It is all. Hridayam (the heart) con-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> sists of three syllables. One syllable is *hri* [meaning "to bring," "to gather"]; and to him who knows this, his own people [the organs] and others [the objects] bring [presents]. One syllable is *da* [meaning "to give"]; and to him who knows this, his own people and others give [their powers]. One syllable is *yam* [meaning "to go"]; and he who knows this goes to heaven.[14]

Therefore, the heart is the seat of intelligence. In the heart merge all names, forms, and works, and the heart is identified with all beings. The heart is the projector of everything we perceive. The sense organs and the objects perceived by them through their respective functions bring offerings, in the form of powers, to the intellect; the intellect in turn passes them to the inmost Self in the heart. Therefore one who knows the heart as such also receives the powers. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* describes the heart as the seat of Brahman: "Om. There is in this city of Brahman [the body] an abode, the small lotus [of the heart]; within it is a small *akasa* [*akasha*, space]. Now what exists within that small *akasa*, that is to be sought after, that is what one should desire to understand."[15] In this verse, the heart is compared to the royal palace in the city of Brahman. Its shape is like that of a lotus bud. Though Brahman pervades the entire body, yet Its presence is especially felt in the heart, which is therefore regarded as a most effective symbol of Brahman. It is said in the Upanishads that Brahman enters the heart as the living Self for the manifestation of names and forms. Brahman is realized in the heart by those aspirants who have controlled their senses, are free from attachment to the external world, and are expert in meditation. The Upanishad continues:

> If they should say to him (the teacher): "Now, with regard to the abode, the small lotus, in this city of Brahman, and the small *akasa* within it—what is there in it that is to be sought after and what is there that one should desire to understand?" Then he (the teacher) should say: "As far as, verily, this [great] *akasa* extends, so far extends the *akasa* within the heart. Both heaven and earth are contained within it, both fire and air, both sun and moon, both lightning and stars; and whatever belongs to him (i.e. the embodied creature) in this

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

world, and whatever does not, all that is contained within it (i.e. the *akasa* in the heart)." If they (the pupils) should say: "If everything that exists—all beings and all desire—is contained in this city of Brahman, then what is left of it when old age overcomes it or when it perishes?"[16]

Then he (the teacher) should say: "With the old age of the body, That (i.e., Brahman, described as the *akasa* in the heart) does not age; with the death of the body That does not die. That Brahman [and not the body] is the real city of Brahman. In It all desires are contained. It is the Self [of all]—free from sin, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger, free from thirst; Its desires come true, Its thoughts come true. Just as, here on earth, people follow as they are commanded [by a leader] and depend upon whatever objects they desire, be it a country or a piece of land [so also those who are ignorant of the Self depend upon other objects and experience the result of their good and evil deeds].[17]

The *Mundaka Upanishad* describes the heart as the focus of the Supreme Self:

The luminous Brahman dwells in the cave of the heart and is known to move there. It is the great support of all; for in It is centered everything that moves, breathes, and blinks. O disciples, know that to be your Self—that which is both gross and subtle, which is adorable, supreme, and beyond the understanding of creatures. That which is radiant, subtler than the subtle, That by which all the worlds and their inhabitants are supported—That, verily, is the indestructible Brahman; That is the *prana,* speech, and the mind; That is the True and That is the Immortal. That alone is to be struck [that is, to be known by the mind]. Strike It [that is, concentrate your mind on Brahman], my good friend.[18]

The *Katha Upanishad* says:

The Purusha, of the size of a thumb, dwells in the body. He is the Lord of the past and the future. After knowing Him,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> one does not conceal oneself any more. This, verily, is That.... There is a city with eleven gates belonging to the unborn Atman of undistorted Consciousness. He who meditates on Him grieves no more; liberated [from the bonds of ignorance], he becomes free. This, verily, is That.[19]

The city of eleven gates is the body. The eleven gates are the eleven apertures: the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, the mouth, the navel, the two lower organs, and the aperture at the top of the head through which the life breath of a *yogin* goes out at the time of death. Further, the *Katha Upanishad* says:

> Know the *atman* to be the master of the chariot; the body, the chariot; the *buddhi* [discriminative faculty], the charioteer; and the mind, the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses; the objects, the roads. The wise call the *atman*—united with the body, the senses, and the mind—the enjoyer.... *Atman*, smaller than the small, greater than the great, is hidden in the hearts of all living creatures. A man who is free from desires beholds the majesty of the Self through tranquility of the senses and the mind and becomes free from grief.[20]

Through this *mahavakya* the Upanishad conveys the idea that the indwelling Self in the heart is the focus of the all-pervading universal Self, known as Brahman. Atman and Brahman are only two names for the same entity. The existence of this Self is not dependent on anything. It exists whether we are aware of It or not. The seeker meditates on his indwelling Self as Brahman. Uninterrupted meditation, accompanied by discrimination, destroys the very root of all ignorance.

Tat Tvam Asi: That Thou Art

"*Tat Tvam Asi,*" which occurs in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* of the *Sama Veda,* is the indicator of spiritual instruction. The Upanishad repeats this *mahavakya* nine times in the same chapter to indicate the ultimate oneness of the individual Self with the universal Self. This oneness is the final teaching of the Upanishads. The verse, which recounts a father speaking to his son, runs as follows:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> "Now, that which is the subtle essence—in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Svataketu."
>
> "Please, venerable Sir, give me further instruction," said the son.
>
> "So be it, my dear," the father replied.[21]

The Self is One without a second, and It alone exists. Names and forms, which differentiate one thing from another, are superimposed on the Self to serve a practical purpose in everyday life. Diversities are the effects, and the Self is their cause. The cause and its effect are essentially not different, for the cause alone is present in the effects. The nature of the effects can be known only by knowing the cause. Thus by knowledge of the Self, all things are known. As the subtle essence of the seed of a tree remains hidden in the seed, as the salt in salt water remains unperceived by sight or touch, in the same way the Self, the subtle essence of everything, though dwelling in the body, remains hidden and unperceived. That Self is our true identity, and It is to be known. By knowledge of this Self alone can one reach the end of all miseries and sorrows. The embodied soul suffers because of ignorance of its true nature. Being forgetful of his true nature, a person becomes a captive of his body and mind. He looks upon himself as a physical being having a specific name and form. He thinks of himself as one who is born and subject to death, as foolish or wise, happy or miserable. Beset by adverse circumstances, he cries out: "I am done for." "How shall I live?" "Where shall I go?" "Who will save me?" As Shankaracharya aptly says:

> The stupid man thinks he is the body, the book-learned man identifies himself with the mixture of body and soul, while the sage possessed of realization due to discrimination looks upon the eternal Atman as his Self, and thinks, "I am Brahman."[22]

The *mahavakya* "That Thou Art," in unmistakable terms, points out that the Supreme Self (Brahman) and the individual Self are identical in essence. The realization of this fact alone can confer true liberation, and only such liberation can put an end to the ever-repeating cycles of births and deaths.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The two words "That" and "Thou" in the *mahavakya* have two meanings—direct and implied. For instance, when it is said that a red-hot iron ball burns an object, the direct meaning is that the ball itself, permeated by fire, does the burning; but the implied meaning is that it is the fire in the ball that burns and not the ball itself. The word "Thou" directly conveys the idea of an individualized soul, together with the Pure Self, which underlies it. The meaning conveyed by the word "Art" in "That Thou Art" is the identity of "That" and "Thou." But it may be observed that "That" and "Thou," endowed with contrary characteristics, cannot be said to be identical in a literal sense. God and the individual soul—the ocean and a well—cannot be identical. The identity that is being spoken of here is from the standpoint of implied meaning.

For instance, upon seeing a person named Thomas after a long time, one might exclaim, "This is that Thomas." One might have seen Thomas in New York in 1960, and then again in London in 1988. The Thomas associated with New York and 1960 is obviously not exactly the same Thomas associated with London and 1988. The time and place of the two occasions are different; but the implied meaning of the statement is the identity of the person himself, and therefore the literal meaning is disregarded. Similarly, in the statement "That Thou Art," the differences of name and form are disregarded, while the implied meaning—the oneness of the all-pervading Self and the individual Self—is upheld, which is the purpose of the statement. As Shankaracharya says: "Just as in the sentence, 'This is that Devadatta,' the identity is spoken of, eliminating the contradictory portions, so in the sentence 'Thou art That,' the wise man must give up the contradictory elements on both sides and recognise the identity of Isvara [Universal Self] and Jiva [individual Self], noticing carefully the essence of both, which is Chit, Knowledge Absolute."[23]

In three words, "*Tat Tvam Asi*," or "That Thou Art," the *mahavakya* sums up the entire teaching of the Vedas and Vedanta. The realization of the true meaning of a *mahavakya* is an indescribable experience that transforms the experiencer forever. Such an experience is never possible so long as the aspirant has any attachment to the body, senses, mind, ego, and pleasures associated with them. This realization of the identity of "Thou" and "That," that

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

is, of the individual Self and the Supreme Self, alone can confer true liberation, which is not only the cessation of all sorrows and miseries but also an experience of unalloyed bliss. Shankaracharya says:

> The yogin who has attained perfection and is liberated-in-life gets this as result—he enjoys eternal Bliss in his mind, internally as well as externally. The result of dispassion is knowledge, that of knowledge is withdrawal from sense-pleasures, which leads to the experience of the Bliss ofthe Self, whence follows Peace. If there is an absence of the succeeding stages, the preceding ones are futile. (When the series is perfect) the cessation of the objective world, extreme satisfaction, and matchless bliss follow as a matter of course.[24]

Meditating on a *Mahavakya*

Shankaracharya instructs the spiritual aspirant to meditate on a *mahavakya* in the following way:

> That which is beyond caste and creed, family and lineage, which is devoid of name and form, merit and demerit; That which transcends space, time, and sense-objects—that Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind. That Supreme Brahman, which cannot be comprehended by speech, but is accessible to the eye of pure illumination; which is stainless, the Embodiment of Knowledge, the Beginningless Entity—that Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind. That which is untouched by the sixfold wave [namely, decay and death, hunger and thirst, grief and delusion, which overtake the body and mind]; meditated upon by the yogis in their hearts, but never grasped by any sense-organ; which the *buddhi* cannot know—that unimpeachable Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind. That which is the Ground of the Universe and its various parts, which are all creations of *maya;* which Itself has no other support; which is distinct from the gross and the subtle; which is partless and peerless—that Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind. That which is free from birth and growth, development, and decline, disease and death;

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> which is indestructible; which is the cause of the projection, maintenance, and dissolution of the universe—that Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind. That which, though One only, is the cause of the many; which refutes all other causes and is Itself without a cause; distinct from *maya* and its effect, the universe, and ever free—that Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind. That which is free from duality; which is infinite and indestructible; which is supreme, eternal, and undying; which is taintless—that Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind. That Reality which, though one, appears manifold owing to ignorance, taking on names and forms, attributes and changes, Itself always unchanged, like gold in its modifications—that Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind. That beyond which there is nothing; which shines above *maya* and is infinitely greater than the universe; the Inmost Self of all; the One without a second; the true Self; Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; infinite and immutable—that Brahman art thou. Meditate on this in thy mind.[25]

As the aspirant meditates on the oneness of his inner Self and the all-pervading Supreme Self, as taught by the spiritual preceptor, there arises in his mind a state in which he feels that he himself is Brahman, ever-pure, eternal, self-illumined, and nondual. This mental state, illumined by the reflection of Pure Consciousness, destroys his attachments and ignorance and dispels his doubt regarding the reality of his true identity. Yet this experience remains for him only a mental state or wave of the mind, which also eventually gets dissolved after destroying all the other diverse mental states. Upon the dissolution of the final mental state, the reflection goes back to the Supreme Self, just as the image of a face in a mirror goes back to the face itself when the mirror is broken or removed. Thus as the final consummation of meditation, the perceiving Consciousness of the aspirant merges in the Pure Consciousness and becomes one with It. That which remains in that state is only the Supreme Self, the all-pervading Pure Consciousness, One without a second.

Shankaracharya advises that an aspirant should at first experience

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the Supreme Self as one with his own inner Self and then experience all beings and things as manifestations of the same Supreme Self. The former state is attained through Yoga, which was described first in the Upanishads and later by Patanjali in his *Aphorisms*. The realization of Yoga culminates in the complete merging of I-consciousness in Brahman, the Supreme Self. Such a knower of the Supreme Self in *samadhi* is alone called liberated. Shankaracharya describes the steps toward this supreme realization:

> The first steps to yoga are control of speech, non-receiving of [superfluous] gifts or favors, entertaining of no expectation, freedom from activity, and always living in a retired place. Living in a retired place serves to control the sense-organs, control of the senses helps to control the mind, through control of the mind egoism is destroyed; and this again gives the yogin an unbroken realization of the Bliss of Brahman. Therefore the man of reflection should always strive only to control the mind. Restrain speech [this implies all the sense-organs] in the *manas* [the mind], and restrain *manas* in the *buddhi* [the intellect]; this again restrain in the witness of the *buddhi* [individual Self], and merging that also in the Infinite Absolute Self, attain to supreme Peace....
>
> It is the man of dispassion *(vairagya)* who is fit for this internal as well as external renunciation; for the dispassionate man, out of desire to be free, relinquishes both internal and external attachment. It is only the dispassionate man who, being thoroughly grounded in Brahman, can give up the external attachment to the sense-objects and the internal attachment for egoism, etc. [that is, all modifications of the mind]. Know, O wise man, dispassion and discrimination to be like the two wings of a bird in the case of an aspirant. Unless both are there, none can, with the help of either one, reach the creeper of liberation that grows, as it were, on the top of an edifice. The extremely dispassionate man alone has samadhi, and the man of samadhi alone gets steady realization; the man who has realized the Truth is alone free from bondage, and only the free soul experiences eternal Bliss.[26]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Direct or Indirect Approach

The four *mahavakyas* constitute the very essence of the teachings of the Upanishads. They present in most succinct and certain terms the Upanishadic view of human life, of the universe, of the nature of the Ultimate Reality, of the goal of life, and of the way to that goal. Each of the *mahavakyas* declares the identity of the individual Self and the all-pervading Supreme Self. The implied meaning of each is that the sole Reality of all realities is Brahman, the immutable, nondual, all-pervading Pure Consciousness. The *mahavakyas* impart Self-Knowledge, the final message of the Upanishads, in a most direct and decisive way.

By their strong affirmation of the fact that the individual Self (Atman) is nothing but Brahman, the *mahavakyas* first strike at the very root of all ignorance and delusion—that we are finite, imperfect, mortal, and bound. And then they proclaim that our true nature is the deathless, ever-free, ever-shining Pure Self, not the time-bound soul, lost forever in the world of merciless laws, destined to suffer and perish. Further, the *mahavakyas* assure us that Brahman, the Self of all beings and things, known by various names and epithets, is not any distant and vague entity, cold and indifferent to human concerns, but is our inmost Self, nearest of the near, ever-manifest, immediate, and direct.

As the *Mundaka Upanishad* says:

> That Brahman shines forth, vast, self-luminous, inconceivable, subtler than the subtle. He is far beyond what is far, and yet here very near at hand. Verily, He is seen here, dwelling in the cave of the heart of conscious beings. Brahman is not grasped by the eye, nor by speech, nor by the other senses, nor by penance or good works. A man becomes pure through serenity of intellect; thereupon, in meditation he beholds Him who is without parts.[27]

Also, the *mahavakyas* teach that Self-Knowledge is a gradual realization of our inmost Self. By knowing our inmost Self, we know God, the Great Self of all beings, and the quest of this Great Self is an inward journey. Self-Knowledge is the supreme goal of life.

There are two approaches to the Supreme Self: direct and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

indirect. The direct approach is to fix one's mind on the fact of the identity of the individual Self and the Supreme Self and then become established in that fact. This direct approach is straight, steep, and uncompromising. The journey on this path requires burning dispassion, total renunciation, perfect self-control, and intense spiritual yearning.

But an average spiritual seeker has limitations. For such a person, the path is necessarily an indirect one, where the Supreme Self is thought of as Personal God, endowed with divine qualities. In this indirect approach, Brahman, the Supreme Self, appears as conditioned by time, space, and causation. Meditation on conditioned Brahman, such as a form of Personal God, eventually leads the seeker to the realization of the unconditioned, or Nirguna, Brahman. Shankaracharya, in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras,* says: "The Vedantic texts teach one and the same Brahman as the object of worship in relation to the adjuncts and as the goal of knowledge without any relation to the adjuncts."[28] Anandagiri, in his gloss on Shankaracharya's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita,* says: "The knowledge of the conditioned Brahman is the doorway to the knowledge of the unconditioned Brahman."[29]

The *Vedanta Paribhasa* points out:

> Meditation on the Conditioned Brahman is also a cause of the realization of the Unconditioned Brahman through the concentration of the mind. So it has been said, "Persons of ordinary intelligence who are unable to realize the Unconditioned Brahman are done a favor by the delineation of the Conditioned Brahman. When their minds are brought under control by the practice (of meditation) on the Conditioned Brahman, that very Unconditioned Brahman, divested of the superimposition of limiting adjuncts, directly manifests Itself."[30]

In the direct approach, the seeker meditates: "I am Brahman" or "I am He." In the indirect approach, the seeker thinks: "I am His." The direct approach emphasizes union; the indirect approach, communion. And communion leads to union. The direct approach leads to the direct perception of the Unconditioned Brahman, that is,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Brahman free from all names, forms, and attributes; in the indirect approach, Brahman, the nameless and formless Ultimate Reality, is perceived as having names, forms, and qualities, which are superimpositions of the seeker's mind. Also, such indirect perception is dependent upon the seeker's faith, devotion, effort, and imagination. That which depends for its origin on the performance of devotional exercises ceases to be in the absence of such performance. But Brahman does not cease to be in the absence of Knowledge of It. Where the direct approach proves to be too difficult, the indirect approach is recommended as next best.

As the *Panchadasi* says:

> Performance of scriptural ordinances is better than being engaged in worldly affairs. Better than that is the worship of a personal Deity and best of all is the meditation on the attributeless Brahman. The importance of each of the three modes of worship depends upon its proximity to the knowledge of Brahman. The meditation on the attributeless Brahman gradually becomes merged in knowledge.[31]

Meditation on a *mahavakya* is meditation on Brahman. It has often been contended that it is impossible to meditate on Brahman, which is beyond speech, mind, and thought. In answer to this contention, the *Panchadasi* says that Brahman is to be meditated upon as such:

> That true knowledge arises through meditation on the attributeless Brahman has been declared in the *Amritabindu Upanishad*. Therefore, even as a door to knowledge, meditation on the attributeless Brahman is superior to other kinds of meditation. Those who give up the meditation on the attributeless Brahman and are engaged in pilgrimages to sacred places and in reciting sacred texts are like those who, dropping the morsel of food from their hand, prefer to lick the bare hand....
>
> Persons whose minds are distracted by too much worry and anxiety can never get knowledge of Brahman by enquiry. Meditation on the attributeless Brahman is necessary for such people as it tames the intellect....

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

That state which is reached by those devoted to knowledge (Sankhya) is also reached by those devoted to meditation (Yoga). He sees properly who sees that the paths of knowledge and meditation are one....

Just as personal worship leads to the knowledge of the Personal God, so meditation on the attributeless Brahman has the power of giving rise to direct knowledge of Brahman, which destroys ignorance, the cause of rebirths....

The *Tapaniya Upanishad* says that one who meditates on the attributeless Brahman without any desire obtains emancipation. The *Prasna Upanishad* says that he who meditates with the desire for heaven obtains the world of Brahma (the Creator). The *Prasna Upanishad* says also that he who meditates by means of the holy syllable "Om" (with a desire for heaven) obtains the world of Brahma (the Creator), where he further obtains a direct knowledge of the attributeless Brahman, who is beyond Hiranyagarbha, the aggregate of all living beings.[32]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

17. Meditation on a Sacred Text, Word, or Mystic Syllable

Meditation may also be practiced on the meaning of a sacred verse, word, or mystic syllable *(mantra)*. As the subject of meditation, an aspirant may choose a particular sacred verse or a sentence from a holy scripture, such as the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the aphorisms of Patanjali or of Narada, or other sacred texts. Or he may choose a sacred word or mantra designated by the sacred texts. He may chant the sacred verse or utter the sacred word and concentrate on the sound of the utterance, or he may simply concentrate on the meaning of the sacred verse or word. Concentration upon the sound of the utterance reveals the meaning, and as such concentration deepens, the meaning reveals the knowledge

Last of all, it is possible to simply meditate on anything that appeals to one as good. Patanjali in his *Yoga Aphorisms* says that whatever is considered holy and spiritually uplifting may be chosen as the subject of meditation.[1] When the mind gets concentrated on a particular object for some length of time, it can then get easily concentrated on any other object too. For example, if one is able to concentrate for an hour on a simple dot, one can easily concentrate on a mountain for a similar period.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Part Three

Centers of Consciousness

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

18. The Centers for Meditation

In meditation, the aspirant may concentrate on his chosen object or ideal as either outside of himself or within himself. The question of centers of consciousness *(chakras)* arises in regard to the latter. At which center of consciousness, or location within oneself, should one place the object of concentration and meditation?

Patanjali defines *dharana* (concentration) as "the holding of the mind to some particular object" and *dhyana* (meditation) as "an unbroken flow of knowledge about that object."[1] In reference to these aphorisms, Swami Vivekananda says:

> When the mind tries to think of one object, to hold itself to one particular spot, such as the top of the head, or the heart, and succeeds in receiving sensations only through that part of the body, and no other part, it has attained *dharana;* and when the mind succeeds in keeping itself in that state for some time, it has attained *dhyana,* meditation.[2]

Swami Vivekananda further explains:

> Fixing the mind on the Lotus of the Heart or on the center in the head is what is called *dharana.* Confined to one spot as the base, certain mental waves arise; these waves, not swallowed up by other kinds of waves, by degrees become prominent, while the latter recede and finally disappear. Next the multiplicity of the original waves gives place to unity and one wave only is left in the mind. This is *dhyana,* meditation.[3]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The sacred texts of Vedanta speak of six centers of consciousness within us, and their names and locations are as follows: *muladhara,* at the base of the spine; *svadhisthana,* at the base of the organ of generation; *manipura,* in the region of the navel; *anahata,* at the level of the heart; *visuddha,* at the lower end of the throat; and *ajna,* in the space between the eyebrows. Beyond the sixth center, at the crown of the head, is *sahasrara,* the highest plane of realization. Strictly speaking, *sahasrara* is not considered a center of consciousness in Vedanta, since it is beyond all the levels of ordinary consciousness.

The areas that Vedantic tradition recommends for the practice of meditation are the heart, the area between the eyebrows, and the crown of the head. An aspirant may select either of the two centers or the crown, but generally one should never meditate at a center below the heart. No spiritual attainment or progress is possible unless one is able to raise one's thoughts up to the level of the heart. Only by consciously raising the mind up to this level does one get established in purity.

The Heart Center

The heart center is extolled greatly by the seers and sages of Vedanta. It is the center where we first feel the light of the Divine. As Sri Ramakrishna says:

> The soul through which God sports is endowed with His special power. The landlord may reside in any part of his estate, but he is generally to be found in a particular drawing-room. The devotee is God's drawing-room. God loves to sport in the heart of His devotee. It is there that His special power is manifest.[4]

The heart center is not the anatomical heart but the spiritual heart. Once an aspirant asked Swami Brahmananda, one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, in which center should I meditate? Should it be the center in the heart or the center in the brain?"

"My boy," Swami Brahmananda replied, "meditation can be practiced in either center, as you please, but I would advise you at first to meditate in the heart. Meditate upon your Istadevata in the lotus of the heart."

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The aspirant then asked: "But sir, the heart is made of flesh and blood. How can I think of God there?"

To this, Swami Brahmananda replied: "By heart, I do not mean the anatomical heart. Think of the spiritual center situated near the heart. In the beginning, as you think of the Lord inside the body, you may think of flesh and blood. But soon you will forget the body and there will remain only the blissful form of your Istadevata."[5]

The location of the heart center is neither to the right nor to the left but near the middle of the chest, where we generally feel emotions. The heart center is the seat of the individual soul, which is the focus of the all-pervading Supreme Self, the Soul of all souls. Our individual consciousness is part of the Cosmic Consciousness; our individual existence is part of the Cosmic Existence. The individual and the universal are inseparable. In meditation at the heart center, the aspirant thinks of the heart as the focus of the all-pervading Pure Consciousness. He then meditates on this Consciousness as light, and in the depth of meditation his individual consciousness merges in the all-pervading Pure Consciousness. Success in any form of meditation depends upon the awakening of spiritual consciousness at the heart center. Such awakening is never possible without the cultivation of inner purity.

Swami Vivekananda wrote: "Think of a space in your heart, and think that in the midst of that space a flame is burning. Think of that flame as your own soul. Inside the flame is another effulgent light, and that is the Soul of your soul, God. Meditate upon that in the heart."[6]

The various Upanishads mention the heart as the main center of consciousness. The *Mundaka Upanishad* says:

> He moves about, becoming manifold, within the heart, where the arteries meet, like the spokes fastened in the nave of a chariot wheel. Meditate on Atman as Om. Hail to you! May you cross beyond the sea of darkness. He who knows all and understands all, and to whom belongs all the glory in the world—He, Atman, is placed in the space in the effulgent abode of Brahman. He assumes the forms of the mind and leads the body and the senses. He dwells in the body, inside the heart. By the knowledge of That which shines as

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the blissful and immortal Atman, the wise behold Him fully in all things.[7]

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says:

The Maker of all things, self-luminous and all-pervading, He dwells always in the hearts of men. He is revealed by the negative teachings,* discriminative wisdom, and the Knowledge of Unity based upon reflection. They who know Him become immortal.... His form is not an object of vision; no one beholds Him with the eyes. They who, through pure intellect and the Knowledge of Unity based upon reflection, realize Him as abiding in the heart become immortal.[8]

The *Chhandogya Upanishad* says:

The Brahman which has been thus described is the same as the [physical] *akasa* [space] outside a person. The *akasa* which is outside a person is the same as that which is inside a person. The *akasa* which is inside a person is the *akasa* within the heart. The *akasa* which is within the heart is omnipresent and unchanging. He who knows this obtains full and unchanging prosperity.... He who consists of the mind, whose body is subtle, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like the *akasa*, whose creation is this universe, who cherishes all [righteous] desires, who contains all [pleasant] odours, who is endowed with all tastes, who embraces all this, who never speaks, and who is without longing—He is my Self within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a grain of millet; He is my Self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the mid-region, greater than heaven, greater than all these worlds. He whose creation is this universe, who cherishes all desires, who contains all odours, who is endowed with all tastes, who embraces all this, who

*"Negative teachings" refers to *neti, neti* (literally, "not this, not this"), the process of discrimination advocated by followers of nondualistic Vedanta.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

never speaks, and who is without longing—He is my Self within the heart, He is that Brahman. When I shall have departed hence I shall certainly reach Him; one who has this faith and has no doubt [will certainly attain to that Godhead].... That Self abides in the heart. The etymological explanation of *heart* is this: This one *(ayam)* is in the heart *(hridi);* therefore It is called the heart *(hridayam).* He who knows this goes every day [in deep sleep] to Heaven (i.e. Brahman, dwelling in the heart).[9]

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says:

There is a space *(akasha)* within the heart; in it lies the Person *(Purusha)* consisting of mind *(manomaya)*, immortal and luminous. The *Sushumna** passes through the piece of flesh which hangs down like a nipple (i.e., the uvula) between the two palates and ends where the skull splits and the roots of the hair lie apart. That Sushumna is the path for the realization of Indra (i.e., The Lord, or Saguna Brahman). The soul of the aspirant, passing through the Sushumna, rests in fire, represented by the *vyahriti*** *bhur;* he rests in the air, represented by the *vyahriti bhuvah.*[10]

Bhur and *bhuvah* refer respectively to the earth and the air. The illumined soul, after coming out of the body at the time of death, becomes established in fire—represented by the *vyahriti bhur* (a symbol of the earth)—a limb, so to speak, of Brahman. That is to say, such a soul pervades the whole world. Similarly, as he gets established in the air—another limb of Brahman—his soul pervades the air. The verse describes the space in the heart as the symbol of Brahman, and the *sushumna* as the doorway to the realization of Brahman.

---

*Among the innumerable nerves in the nervous system, the Sushumna is the most important. It is situated within the spinal column and extends from the base of the spine to the brain. The Sushumna, through which the awakened spiritual energy rises, is described as the Brahmavartman, or pathway to Brahman.

**The Sanskrit word *vyahriti* signifies an utterance, because these names are uttered in various rituals. There are, in all, seven *vyahritis,* which are symbols of the seven planes, namely *bhur, bhuvah, suvah (swah), maha, jana, tapah,* and *satya.* The first three are called the great *vyahritis.*

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Regarding the center of consciousness at the heart, the *Katha Upanishad* says:

> There are one hundred and one arteries [*nadis*, energy channels for *prana*] of the heart, one of which pierces the crown of the head. Going upward by it, a man [at death] attains immortality. But when his *prana* passes out by other arteries, going in different directions, then he is reborn in the world. The Purusha, not larger than a thumb, the inner Self, always dwells in the hearts of men. Let a man separate Him from his body with steadiness, as one separates the tender stalk from a blade of grass. Let him know that Self as the Bright, as the Immortal—yea, as the Bright, as the Immortal.[11]

The *Mundaka Upanishad* says:

> The Purusha alone is verily the universe, which consists of work and austerity. O my good friend, he who knows this Brahman—the Supreme and the Immortal, hidden in the cave of the heart—cuts asunder even here the knot of ignorance.[12]

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says:

> The Purusha, no bigger than a thumb, is the inner Self, ever seated in the heart of man. He is known by the mind, which controls knowledge, and is perceived in the heart. They who know Him become immortal.... The Self, smaller than the small, greater than the great, is hidden in hearts of creatures. The wise, by the grace of the Creator, behold the Lord, majestic and desireless, and become free from grief.[13]

The *Prasna Upanishad* says:

> The *atman* dwells in the heart, where there are one hundred and one arteries *(nadi)*; for each of these there are one hundred branches, and for each of these branches, again, there are seventy-two thousand subsidiary vessels. *Vyana* [vital energy that pervades the entire body] moves in these.[14]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The *Mandukya Upanishad* says:

Know *Aum* to be Isvara, ever present in the hearts of all. The calm soul, contemplating *Aum* as all-pervading, does not grieve.[15]

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says:

The *akasha* is the honey (effect) of all beings, and all beings are the honey (effect) of this *akasha.* Likewise, the bright immortal being who is in this *akasha* and the bright, immortal being identified with the *akasha* in the heart in the body [are both honey]. [These four] are but this Self. [The Knowledge of] this [Self] is [the means to] Immortality; this [underlying unity] is Brahman; this [Knowledge of Brahman] is [the means of becoming] all.... "Which is the self?" This *purusha,* which is identified with the intellect *(vijnanamaya)* and is in the midst of the organs, the [self-effulgent] light within the heart (intellect). Assuming the likeness [of the intellect], it wanders between the two worlds; it thinks, as it were, and moves, as it were. Being identified with dreams, it transcends this [waking] world, which represents the forms of death (ignorance and its effects).... That great unborn Self, which is identified with the intellect *(vijnanamaya)* and which dwells in the midst of the organs, lies in the *akasa* within the heart. It is the controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all. It does not become greater through good deeds or smaller through evil deeds. It is the lord of all, the ruler of all beings, the protector of all beings. It is the dam that serves as the boundary to keep the different worlds apart. The brahmins seek to realize It through the study of the Vedas, through sacrifices, through gifts, and through austerity which does not lead to annihilation. Knowing It alone one becomes a sage *(muni).* Wishing for this World (i.e., the Self) alone, monks renounce their homes.[16]

The *Brahma Upanishad* says:

Within the recess of the heart is that *akasha* of consciousness—that with many openings, the aim of knowledge,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

within the space of the heart—in which all this (universe outside) evolves and moves about, in which all this is warped and woofed (as it were). (Who knows this), knows fully all creation. There the *devas*, the *rishis*, the *pitris* have no control, for being fully awakened, one becomes the knower of all truth.... The heart (i.e., the inner chamber of the heart) resembles the calyx of a lotus, full of cavities and also with its face turned downwards. Know that to be the great habitat of the whole universe.[17]

The *Mahanarayana Upanishad* says:

The Infinite Self, more minute than the minute and greater than the great, is set in the heart of beings here. Through the grace of the Creator one realizes Him who is free from desires based on values, who is supremely great and who is the highest ruler and master of all, and becomes free from sorrows.... In the citadel of the body there is the small sinless and pure lotus of the heart which is the residence of the Supreme. Further in the interior of this small area there is the sorrowless Ether. That is to be meditated upon continually.... One should meditate upon the Supreme—the limitless, unchanging, all-knowing cause of the happiness of the world, dwelling in the sea of one's own heart, as the goal of all striving. The place for His meditation is the ether in the heart—the heart which is comparable to an inverted lotus bud. It should be known that the heart, which is located just at the distance of a finger span [the distance between the tip of one's thumb and the tip of the little finger when the hand is fully extended] below the Adam's apple and above the navel, is the great abode of the universe. Like the bud of a lotus, suspended in an inverted position, is the heart, surrounded by arteries. In it there is a narrow space (or near it there is a narrow space called Sushumna). In it everything is supported. In the middle of that (narrow space of the heart or Sushumna) remains the undecaying, all-knowing, omni-faced, great Fire, which has flames on every side, which enjoys the food presented before it, which remains assimilating the food consumed

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> (the rays of which spread scattering themselves vertically and horizontally), and which warms its own body from the insole to the crown. In the centre of that Fire which permeates the whole body, there abides a tongue of Fire, of the colour of shining gold, which is the topmost among the subtle, which is dazzling like the flash of the lightning that appears in the middle of a rain-bearing cloud, which is as slender as the awn of a paddy grain, and which serves as a comparison to illustrate subtlety. Paramatman dwells in the middle of that flame. (Although He is thus limited) still He is the four-faced creator, Shiva, Vishnu, Indra, the material and efficient cause of the Universe and the Supreme Self-luminous Pure Consciousness.[18]

The Center between the Eyebrows

The second center of consciousness where meditation is often practiced is the space between the eyebrows. Stimulation of this center opens up the mystic spiritual eye, which is capable of perceiving the timeless Reality. The *Bhagavad Gita* briefly outlines the disciplines and observances for the practice of meditation and in that context makes mention of the space between the eyebrows as the place to concentrate upon:

> Shutting out all external objects; fixing the gaze of his eyes between his brows; equalizing the outward and inward breaths moving in his nostrils; controlling his senses, mind, and understanding; being ever bent on liberation; ridding himself of desire, fear, and anger—such a man of contemplation is indeed always free.[19]

The meaning of the words "fixing the gaze of his eyes between his brows" is that when the eyes are half-closed in meditation, the eyeballs remain motionless and their gaze converges toward a point between the brows. On the other hand, if the eyes are fully open, they may stray to external objects, and if they are closed, the aspirant may fall asleep.

The *Bhagavad Gita* also mentions the "tip of the nose" as a point to concentrate upon: "He should sit firm, holding his body, neck, and head erect and still, and gaze steadily at the tip of his

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

nose, without looking around."[20] This verse prepares the aspirant for meditation as indicated in 6.25 of the *Gita,* where it is stated that the mind should be made to dwell on the Self without thinking of anything else. The instruction about gazing at the tip of the nose should not be taken in a literal sense, for then the mind would be fixed *only* on the tip of the nose and not on the Self. When the eyes are withdrawn from sense objects, the mind becomes steady and the eyeballs are still. In that state, the gaze is directed, as it were, to the tip of the nose.

The Crown of the Head

In addition to the heart center and the center between the eyebrows, the crown of the head is considered the third place recommended by the traditions for holding the mind during meditation. The crown—called *sahasrara,* or the thousand-petaled lotus in the brain—is the point where individual consciousness meets with the all-pervading universal Consciousness. This union is the ultimate goal of all meditation. By reaching the *sahasrara,* the potential perfection in each of us has its fullest manifestation in the infinite dimension. As a flowing river merges in the ocean and becomes one with it, so also the individual consciousness flowing through the channel of *sushumna* in the spinal cord merges in the ocean of Pure Consciousness. Swami Vivekananda describes the crown of the head as the "metropolis of all sensations" and says the following:

> When a minute portion of energy travels along a nerve fibre and causes a reaction from the centres, the perception is either dream or imagination. But when by the power of long internal meditation the vast mass of energy stored up travels along the Sushumna and strikes the centres, the reaction is tremendous, immensely superior to the reaction of dream or imagination, immensely more intense than the reaction of sense perception. It is supersensuous perception. And when it reaches the metropolis of all sensations, the brain, the whole brain, as it were, reacts, and the result is the full blaze of illumination, the perception of the Self. As this Kundalini force travels from centre to centre, layer after layer of the mind, as it were, opens up, and the uni-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> verse is perceived by the yogi in its fine, or causal, form. Then alone are the causes of the universe, both as sensation and as reaction, known as they are; and hence comes all knowledge.[21]

According to Tantra, the goal of all spiritual practices is to rouse our sleeping consciousness and make it move upward through the six centers within us. As it reaches the sixth center, between the eyebrows, the seeker sheds his ego and burns the seed of separativeness. His higher Self rises from the ashes of his lower self. The sixth center is the gateway to the crown of the head, where the limitless ocean of Pure Consciousness engulfs the small and limited reservoir of individual consciousness. The crown of the head, Tantra maintains, is the seat of "Shiva," or absolute Pure Consciousness. The mind, which Tantra designates as "Shakti," or relative consciousness, reaches its supreme fulfillment by returning to the Absolute and being united with It.

Swami Vivekananda gives the following guided meditation:

> Imagine a lotus upon the top of the head, several inches up, with virtue as its centre and knowledge as its stalk. The eight petals of the lotus are the eight powers of the yogi. Inside, the stamens and pistils are renunciation. If the yogi refuses the external powers he will come to salvation. So the eight petals of the lotus are the eight powers, but the internal stamens and pistils are extreme renunciation, the renunciation of all these powers. Inside that lotus, think of the Golden One, the Almighty, the Intangible, whose name is Om, the Inexpressible, surrounded with effulgent light. Meditate on that.[22]

Passing through the Six Centers

There is another method, in which the aspirant meditates on the different centers of consciousness within. Often such meditation is accompanied by *pranayama* or control of breath. According to the sacred texts of Vedanta, the six centers of consciousness are located along the spinal column. Sri Ramakrishna describes these centers as follows:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The mind of a worldly man generally moves along the three lower centres: those at the navel, at the sexual organ, and at the organ of evacuation. After great effort and spiritual practice, the Kundalini is awakened. According to the yogis there are three nerves in the spinal column: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. Along the Sushumna are six lotuses, or centres, the lowest being known as the Muladhara [at the base of the spine]. Then come successively Svadhisthana [at the base of the organ of generation], Manipura [in the region of the navel], Anahata [at the level of the heart], Visuddha [at the lower end of the throat], and Ajna [in the space between the eyebrows]. These are the six centres. The Kundalini, when awakened, passes through the lower centres and comes to the Anahata, which is at the heart. It stays there. At that time the mind of the aspirant is withdrawn from the three lower centres. He feels the awakening of Divine Consciousness and sees Light. In mute wonder he sees that radiance and cries out: "What is this? What is this?"

After passing through the six centres, the Kundalini reaches the thousand-petalled lotus known as the Sahasrara, and the aspirant goes into *samadhi.*

According to the Vedas these centres are called bhumi, "planes." There are seven such planes. The centre at the heart corresponds to the fourth plane of the Vedas. According to the Tantra there is in this centre a lotus called Anahata, with twelve petals.

The centre known as Visuddha is the fifth plane. This centre is at the throat and has a lotus with sixteen petals. When the Kundalini reaches this plane, the devotee longs to talk and hear only about God. Conversation on worldly subjects, on "woman and gold," causes him great pain. He leaves a place where people talk of these matters.

Then comes the sixth plane, responding to the centre known as Ajna. This centre is located between the eyebrows and it has a lotus with two petals. When the Kundalini reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God. But still there remains a slight barrier between the devotee

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

and God. It is like a light inside a lantern. You may think you have touched the light, but in reality you cannot because of the barrier of glass.

And last of all is the seventh plane, which, according to Tantra, is the centre of the thousand-petalled lotus. When the Kundalini arrives there, the aspirant goes into samadhi. In that lotus dwells Satchidananda Siva, the Absolute. There Kundalini, the awakened Power, unites with Siva. This is known as the union of Siva and Sakti.

When the Kundalini rises to the Sahasrara and the mind goes into *samadhi*, the aspirant loses all consciousness of the outer world. He can no longer retain his physical body. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out again. In that state the life-breath lingers for twenty-one days and then passes out. Entering the "black waters" of the ocean, the ship never comes back. But the Isvarakotis, such as the Incarnations of God, can come down from this state of samadhi. They can descend from this exalted state because they like to live in the company of devotees and enjoy the love of God. God retains in them the "ego of Knowledge" or the "ego of Devotion" so that they may teach men. Their minds move between the sixth and seventh planes. They run a boat-race back and forth, as it were, between these two planes.[23]

The aspirant pictures consciousness, symbolized as *kundalini*, or the coiled-up power, being slowly lifted from center to center in an ascending order, until the highest center at the crown of the head is reached. As Swami Vivekananda says:

It is very useful to meditate on the Sushumna. You may have a vision of it come to you and this is the best way. Then meditate for a long time on that. It is a very fine, very brilliant thread, this living passage through the spinal cord, this way of salvation through which we have to make the Kundalini rise.... We must awaken the Kundalini, then slowly raise it from one lotus to another till the brain is reached. Each stage corresponds to a new layer of the mind.[24]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

In summary, Sri Ramakrishna comments as follows on the centers of consciousness appropriate for meditation:

> The heart is a splendid place. One can meditate there or in the Sahasrara. There are rules for meditation given in the scriptures. But you may meditate wherever you like. Every place is filled with Brahman-Consciousness. Is there any place where It does not exist?... There are two kinds of meditation, one on the formless God and the other on God with form. But meditation on the formless God is extremely difficult. In that meditation you must wipe out all that you see or hear. You contemplate only the nature of your Inner Self. Meditating on His Inner Self, Siva dances about. He exclaims, "What am I? What am I?" This is called the "Siva yoga." While practicing this form of meditation, one directs one's look to the forehead. It is meditation on the nature of one's Inner Self after negating the world, following the Vedantic method of "Neti, neti." There is another form of meditation known as the "Vishnu yoga." The eyes are fixed on the tip of the nose. Half the look is directed inward and the other half outward. This is how one meditates on God with form. Sometimes Siva meditates on God with form and dances. At that time he exclaims, "Rama! Rama!" and dances about.[25]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

19. Dualism, Nondualism, and the Centers

Meditation in any of the centers of consciousness may be of three types: dualistic, nondualistic, or a combination of the two. The three types are mere terms that indicate three approaches to the Ultimate Reality. As we saw earlier, the approach of dualism is indirect, that of nondualism is direct, while that of the combination is indirect-direct. The goal of all three approaches is to connect the individual self with the Ultimate.

The aspirant following the dualistic way takes an indirect approach, begins with a form, and gradually realizes that the form is, in reality, a luminous vista of the Ultimate, which is beyond all forms and names. Following the nondualistic way, the aspirant takes the direct approach, looks upon the Ultimate as the formless, attributeless, all-pervading Supreme Self, and concentrates on that. In the combined method, meditation with form culminates in formless meditation. The direct approach of the nondualistic way, though extolled as best and therefore intellectually inviting, is difficult to practice. Accustomed to dwelling on forms, concepts, and symbols, many are not able to fix their minds on the infinite Self, devoid of any form or attribute. For such aspirants either the dualistic approach or the combined approach is preferable.

The sacred texts describe several examples of formless meditation: (a) the aspirant imagines that, like a fish, he is swimming in the infinite ocean of Pure Consciousness without any obstruction whatsoever; (b) like a bird, he is flying in the infinite sky with nothing

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

to impede his free flight; (c) he thinks of himself as a pot immersed in water—water inside and water outside.

Sri Ramakrishna describes the ways of meditation that are practiced by the *jnanis* (the followers of the path of Knowledge):

> Everywhere is water; all the regions above and below are filled with water; man, like a fish, is swimming joyously in that water. In real meditation you will actually see all this.
>
> Take the case of the infinite ocean. There is no limit to its water. Suppose a pot is immersed in it: there is water both inside and outside the pot. The *jnani* sees that both inside and outside there is nothing but Paramatman. Then what is this pot? It is "I-consciousness." Because of the pot the water appears to be divided into two parts; because of the pot you seem to perceive an inside and an outside. One feels that way as long as the pot of "I" exists. When the "I" disappears, what *is* remains. That cannot be described in words.
>
> Do you know another way a *jnani* meditates? Think of the infinite *akasa* [space] and a bird flying there, joyfully spreading its wings. There is the Chidakasa [all-pervading expanse of Pure Consciousness], and Atman [the inmost Self] is the bird. The bird is not imprisoned in a cage; it flies in the Chidakasa. Its joy is limitless.[1]

Elsewhere, Sri Ramakrishna states:

> There is another method [of attaining yoga]—that of meditation. In the Sahasrara [crown of the head] Siva manifests Himself in a special manner. The aspirant should meditate on Him. The body is like a tray; the mind and *buddhi* are like water. The Sun of Satchidananda [the Supreme Self] is reflected in this water. Meditating on the reflected sun, one sees the Real Sun through the grace of God.[2]

Sri Ramakrishna speaks of another type of formless meditation: meditation on the flame of a lamp set in a windless place. "I used to meditate on the flame of a light. I thought of the red part as gross, the white part inside the red as subtle, and the stick-like black

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

part, which is the innermost of all, as the causal."[3] Following the nondualistic way, the aspirant may also think of himself as a point of self-conscious light merged in the ocean of infinite light. First he thinks of himself as a point of light. Then he tries to feel that he is part of an ocean of infinite light. Finally he makes the point of light merge in that ocean.

The principles adopted in this formless meditation are two. Either the aspirant makes his soul the center of his consciousness and tries to feel the infinite in that, or he makes the infinite the center of his consciousness and thinks of his soul as the manifestation of that infinite. When the individual soul is thought of as the center of consciousness, the infinite is thought of as a circle all around the soul, and when the infinite is taken as the center of consciousness, the soul is thought of as a point existing in it.

There is yet another method of formless meditation, in which the aspirant sits in a fixed posture and follows a process of negation traditionally known as "*neti, neti*" ("not this, not this"). In this process he begins to separate himself step by step from his body, vital force, senses, mind, and intellect, and finally he reaches his inmost Self and dwells on It. Shankaracharya describes this process of negation:

> Om. I am neither the mind, intelligence, ego, nor chitta [the seat of memory].
>
> Neither the ears nor the tongue, nor the senses of smell and sight; neither ether nor air, nor fire nor water nor earth: I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness—I am Siva! [the Supreme Self] I am Siva!
>
> I am neither the prana [the vital force that sustains life in a physical body] nor the five vital breaths [the various functions of the prana], neither the seven elements of the body [water, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and semen], nor its five sheaths [the sheaths of food, prana, mind, intelligence, and bliss, which conceal Atman, or the Self, as a scabbard conceals a sword], nor hands, nor feet, nor tongue, nor other organ of action: I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness—I am Siva! I am Siva![4]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Part Four

Methods of Concentration

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

20. *Withdrawal and Concentration of Mind*

There is a gulf of difference between meditation in theory and meditation in practice. Success in meditation calls for the ability to invoke concentration of mind at will. Concentration, again, is not possible unless the aspirant is able to withdraw his mind from its outgoing preoccupations. As Shankaracharya says: "Success depends essentially on a qualified aspirant; time, place and other such means are but auxiliaries in this regard."[1] There is much wisdom in the Christian saying "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."[2]

The higher intellect understands the need for concentration and meditation, but the emotions run deep and the mind is by nature turbulent, stubborn, and restless. Averse to any kind of regularity, the mind can think of neither one thing for a long time nor many things in a systematic way. It is constantly being pulled in different directions by the *samskaras*, or ingrained habits of the past. While one part of the mind wants to concentrate, the other part resists. What, then, is the way?

In answer, the sacred texts and traditions of Vedanta and Yoga maintain that the mind never becomes controlled unless it is consciously controlled. The capacity to invoke concentration at will does not develop by itself. It is never achieved by any miraculous or vicarious means. Such capacity is always the result of conscious practice in a regulated way, following proper methods, over a long period, with devotion, patience, and perseverance. The methods that are suggested by the sacred texts and traditions of Vedanta and Yoga for invoking concentration are the following:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

posture
time and place
physical condition and diet
the process of self-analysis
mystic worship
japa, or repetition of a specific sacred word
pranayama, or control of breath
ceremonial observances and mystic worship

However, before any of these can be applied, Swami Vivekananda cautions:

> Certain positions, certain modes of breathing, help to harmonise and concentrate the mind, but with these must go purity and strong desire for God, or realisation. The attempt to sit down and fix the mind on one idea and hold it there will prove to most people that there is some need for help to enable them to do this successfully. The mind has to be gradually and systematically brought under control.[3]

Swami Vivekananda goes on to describe the process as follows:

> This is a lesson seeking to bring out the individuality. Each individuality must be cultivated. All will meet at the centre. "Imagination is the door to inspiration and the basis of all thought." All prophets, poets, and discoverers have had great imaginative power. The explanation of nature is in us; the stone falls outside, but gravitation is in us, not outside. Those who stuff themselves, those who starve themselves, those who sleep too much, those who sleep too little, cannot become Yogis. Ignorance, fickleness, jealousy, laziness, and excessive attachment are the great enemies to success in Yoga practice. The three great requisites are: First. Purity, physical and mental: All uncleanness, all that would draw the mind down, must be abandoned. Second. Patience; at first there will be wonderful manifestations, but they will all cease. This is the hardest period, but hold fast; in the end the gain is sure if you have patience. Third. Perseverance:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Persevere through thick and thin, through health and sickness, never miss a day in practice. The best time for practice is the junction of day and night, the calmest time in the tides of our bodies, the zero point between states. If this cannot be done, practice upon rising and going to bed. Great personal cleanliness is necessary—a daily bath. After bathing, sit down and hold the seat firm, that is, imagine that you sit as firm as a rock, that nothing can move you. Hold the head and shoulders and the hips in a straight line, keeping the spinal column free; all action is along it, and it must not be impaired. Begin with your toes and think of each part of your body as perfect; picture it so in your mind, touching each part if you prefer to do so. Pass upward bit by bit until you reach the head, thinking of each as perfect, lacking nothing. Then think of the whole as perfect, an instrument given to you by God to enable you to attain Truth, the vessel in which you are to cross the ocean and reach the shores of eternal truth. When this has been done, take a long breath through both nostrils, throw it out again, and then hold it out as long as you comfortably can. Take four such breaths, then breathe naturally and pray for illumination. "I meditate on the glory of the being who created this universe; may he illuminate my mind." Sit and meditate on this ten or fifteen minutes. Tell your experiences to no one but your Guru. Talk as little as possible. Keep your thoughts on virtue; what we think, we tend to become. Holy meditation helps to burn out all mental impurities. All who are not Yogis are slaves; bond after bond must be broken to make us free.[4]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

21. *Posture*

Regarding the necessity of correct posture, Swami Vivekananda says:

> First, to sit in the posture in which you can sit still for a long time. All the nerve currents which are working pass along the spine. The spine is not intended to support the weight of the body. Therefore the posture must be such that the weight of the body is not on the spine. Let it be free from all pressure.[1]

> We should try to meditate inside [the body]. As for the mind being here or there, it will take a long time before we reach the mental plane. Now our struggle is with the body. When one acquires a perfect steadiness in posture, then and then alone one begins to struggle with the mind. Asana (posture) being conquered, one's limbs remain motionless, and one can sit as long as one pleases.[2]

> Take the easiest posture in sitting. Have the three parts straight—the ribs, the shoulders, and the head—leaving the spine free and straight, no leaning backwards or forwards. Then mentally hold the body as perfect, part by part. Then send a current of love to all the world; then pray for enlightenment. And lastly, join your mind to your breath and gradually attain the power of concentrating your attention on its movements. The reason for this will be apparent by degrees.[3]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

According to Patanjali, concentration, meditation, and *samadhi* are the three successive internal practices of Yoga. These three internal practices are supported by five external practices—*yama* (moral restraints), *niyama* (moral observances), *asana* (posture), *pranayama* (control of the breath), and *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses). Practice of posture is advised for aspirants after they have gained some mastery over the practices of *yama* and *niyama*.

A steady posture endows the aspirant with control over his body. Restlessness of the mind finds expression in the restlessness of the body. Traditionally, meditation is practiced with a fixed posture. Success in the practice of posture is considered the first step toward success in meditation. According to some texts, when an aspirant is able to remain seated in one fixed posture for four hours and twenty minutes, he is said to have gained mastery over that posture. The purpose of the practice of *asana* is to overcome both discomfort and drowsiness.

Patanjali in his *Aphorisms* describes correct posture as that posture which is "firm and pleasant." Commenting on this aphorism, Swami Vivekananda says:

> Firmness of posture means that you do not feel the body at all. Generally speaking, you will find that as soon as you sit for a few minutes you feel all sorts of bodily disturbances. But when you have gone beyond the idea of a gross, physical body, you will lose all sense of the body. You will feel neither pleasure nor pain. And when you again become aware of it, you will feel completely rested. This is the only real rest that you can give to the body. When you have succeeded in controlling the body and keeping it firm, your practice will be steady; but while you are disturbed by the body, your nerves become disturbed and you cannot concentrate the mind.[4]

The perfect posture is that in which the spine, the head, the chest, and the neck are kept erect and there is no movement of the body, and the mind remains in a state of equilibrium. The habit of keeping the body always at rest and effortless helps the practice of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

posture. As the aspirant gains control over posture, he will feel as though his body has become fixed to the earth. On attaining further steadiness, he will feel that his body is nonexistent, as it were.

The sacred texts describe eighty-four yogic postures, but only a few of them are considered conducive to the practice of meditation. Of these few, the one that is most important and widely followed is the *padmasana*, or lotus position. In this position the aspirant sits with legs crossed in such a way that each foot rests sole up on the opposite thigh. The spinal column up to the base of the brain is held completely erect. Hands are placed in the lap with palms up, one hand on top of the other, thumbs touching, or hands are placed on the thighs. The eyes are kept half open and their attention fixed in the heart or in between the eyebrows.

Swami Saradananda, in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna, mentions the following regarding correct posture:

> The Master, it is known to us, was one day teaching a young man various kinds of sitting and other bodily postures fit for the meditation on God with forms and on God without forms. Sitting in the posture of *padmasana*, placing on the palm of his left hand the back of his right, taking both the hands in that posture to his breast and shutting his eyes, he said: "This is the best posture for all kinds of meditation on God with forms." And remaining seated in that posture of *padmasana*, placing his right and left hands on his right and left knees respectively, bringing together the tips of the thumb and forefinger of each hand while keeping all the other fingers straight, and steadying his eyes between the eyebrows, he said, "This is the most commended posture for the meditation on God without forms."[5]

In any type of posture, the body must be motionless and, at the same time, comfortable. In order to focus the lens of a telescope on an object, the telescope must be kept steady; similarly, the body and mind must be made steady before one can concentrate on an object and have a clear vision of it. The eyes are kept half open to avoid both external and internal distractions, and the body is kept erect, because in a bent or bowed position there is a tendency toward inertia or even sleep.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Patanjali points out the way to achieve firmness of posture: "Through the lessening of the natural tendency [for activity, caused by identification with the body] and through meditation on the Infinite [posture becomes firm and pleasant]."[6] Commenting on the meaning of this aphorism, Swami Vivekananda says: "We can make the posture firm by thinking of the Infinite. We cannot actually think of the transcendental Infinite, but we can think of the infinite sky."[7]

The next aphorism of Patanjali says: "Posture being conquered, the dualities do not obstruct."[8] That is to say, when posture is conquered, the aspirant overcomes all dualities, such as good and bad, heat and cold, pain and pleasure, and various other pairs of opposites.

There are several testimonials in the sacred texts of Vedanta regarding posture. In the *Svetasvatara Upanishad,* it is stated:

> Placing the body in a straight posture, with the chest, the neck, and the head held erect, making the organs and the mind enter the heart, the sage crosses all the fearful currents by means of the raft of Brahman.[9]

From the *Bhagavad Gita:*

> He should sit firm, holding his body, neck and head erect and still, and gaze steadily at the tip of his nose, without looking around.[10]

The *Vyasa Sutras* indicate: "Worship is possible in a sitting posture. [Therefore one should be seated while worshipping.]"[11] As Swami Vivekananda explains: "When we see a man seated without moving his limbs, we say that he is meditating. Therefore meditation is possible for a person who is seated."[12]

The Samkhya philosophy states: "Posture is that which is steady and easy.... Any posture which is steady and easy is an *asana;* there is no injunction [about any particular posture]."[13]

Practice of posture is intended to bring about withdrawal of mind and absorption in meditation. But preoccupation with the physical aspect of meditation can make one lose sight of the goal. So Shankaracharya in his *Aparokshanubhuti* (Self-Realization) observes:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

One should know that to be real posture in which the meditation of Brahman flows spontaneously and unceasingly, and not any other [posture] that destroys one's happiness. [The meaning of the phrase "not any other" refers to any posture which brings about physical pain and thus distracts the mind from the meditation of Brahman by dragging it down to the lower plane.] That which is well known as the origin of all beings and the support of the whole universe, which is immutable and in which the enlightened are completely merged—that alone is known as Siddhasana. [Siddhasana is the name of a particular Yogic posture, but here it means the eternal Brahman.] That [Brahman] which is the root of all existence and on which the restraint of the mind is based is called the restraining root [Mulabandha—also the name of another Yogic posture], which should always be adopted since it is fit for Raja-Yogins. [It is through complete mergence in Brahman that the mind is truly restrained. The truth indicated here is that while seated for meditation one should not bother much about the postures, but always try to engage one's whole attention to the meditation of Brahman, which alone constitutes the goal.] Absorption in the uniform Brahman should be known as the equipoise of the limbs [Dehasamya]. Otherwise mere straightening of the body like that of a dried-up tree is no equipoise.[14]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

22. *Time and Place, Spiritual Vibrations, and Geographical Directions*

Time for Meditation

Although there is no fixed time for the practice of meditation, the sacred texts mention four times that are most favorable and auspicious. The first of them is the *brahmamuhurta* ("moment of Brahman"), between three and five in the morning. During those hours there flows through nature a special spiritual current that is very conducive to the practice of meditation. The *Rig Veda* (1.125.1) says: "Coming at early dawn, He gives the treasure." Psychologically speaking, in the early dawn the body and mind remain in a state of inertia and, as a result, are easily overcome by any surge of gross thoughts from the subconscious level. By waking up at that period, one returns to the conscious level and avoids such surges.

The second time is midday, when nature has a tendency to return to calmness and rest. The third is the hour of dusk, when day merges into night and nature becomes tranquil. And the fourth is midnight, when a deep silence pervades all of nature.

It is important to note that the times for meditation, once chosen, must be observed every day. This is because there is a cycle or rhythm in the movement of forces, spiritual as well as material. By maintaining a fixed time for meditation, the aspirant develops a strong tendency within himself to feel the mood for meditation at the same precise hour every day.

The hours of meditation form the peak periods of the day, when the mind rises to the spiritual plane of consciousness. An aspirant is advised to make every effort to see that his mind does not

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

lose the spiritual altitude gained during each period of meditation. Therefore, the mood or state of consciousness attained in meditation should be prolonged as much as possible even during the hours of nonmeditation. In other words, the extent of the meditative mood maintained during the hours of meditation determines the height of the ascent during the peak periods.

Concerning the time of day for meditation practice, Swami Vivekananda says:

> What is the best time for practice in Yoga? The junction time of dawn and twilight, when all nature becomes calm. Take the help of nature.[1]

Regarding the length of time to be devoted to meditation, Swami Vidyaranya, in his *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka,* gives the following guidelines:

> "The beginner should follow the right course of yoga thus: he should fill two parts of his mind with objects of enjoyment, one part by the study of the scriptures, and one part by attending on his preceptor" (*Laghu-Yoga-Vasistha-Ramayana* 21.36; *Yoga-Vasistha-Ramayana* 5.24.45).
>
> "When he has progressed to some extent, then he should fill one part of his mind with objects of enjoyment, one part by reflecting on the scriptures, and the remaining two parts by attending upon the preceptor" (*Laghu-Yoga-Vasistha-Ramayana* 21.37; *Yoga-Vasistha-Ramayana* 5.24.46).
>
> "When quite advanced, he should fill half of his mind by study of scriptures and practice of renunciation, and the remaining half by meditation and worshiping his teacher" (*Laghu-Yoga-Vasistha-Ramayana* 21.38); *Yoga-Vasistha-Ramayana* 5.24.47).
>
> The word *bhoga*—objects of enjoyment—means here such acts as to go begging for food to subsist on and the like, and such activities as required according to the caste and stage of life.
>
> He should practise yoga according to his ability for one *ghatika* or one *muhurta,* i.e., twenty-four minutes or forty-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> eight minutes; then a *muhurta* he should spend with his teacher in studying scripture and also in serving him and the next *muhurta* in meeting the needs of his own body, then the next *muhurta* in the study of the science of yoga, and then again he should practise yoga. Thus, laying greater emphasis on yoga, he should mingle all other (favourable) activities with it and should finish them quickly, then retiring to bed he should count the *muhurtas* devoted to yoga. Then he should increase the *muhurtas* of yoga next day or in the next fortnight or in the next month. In this manner, by adding even a moment to the *yoga-muhurta*, the time of yoga will become greatly increased in just a year.[2]

Regarding the length of time in meditation, Swami Brahmananda says:

> Devote as much time as possible to japam and meditation and to worship and study. Those who want to lead a purely contemplative life should spend at least sixteen hours a day in japam and meditation. As you continue your practice, you will be able to increase the time. The more the mind is turned inward, the more joy you will get. Once you get joy in meditation, it will be hard to discontinue it. Then you will no longer have to ask how long you should meditate. Your mind will tell you. Before you reach this stage, try to spend two-thirds of the day in japam and meditation, and the rest of the time in study of the scriptures and self-introspection. It is not enough to practice meditation closing the eyes for an hour. One should examine the mind and eliminate its subtle cravings for the world. Then when the mind becomes calm, one can get deep meditation. The goal of spiritual practices is to calm the mind. If your mind is not tranquil and if you do not get joy within, remember, you are not on the right track. I shall remind you of one thing: The person who is providing food for you will get some result of your sadhana. Therefore you must acquire enough so that you will have some left after giving to others.[3]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

A Favorable Environment

The *Vyasa Sutras* state, "There is no law of place; wherever the mind is concentrated, meditation should be practised."[4] Nonetheless, environment is a powerful aid in creating the mood for concentration and meditation. In order to be favorable, the environment must be tranquil, far from the haunts of the worldly minded, pure, and pleasant to the sight. According to the sacred texts of Vedanta, some of the places which are favorable for the practice of meditation are a mountain, a riverbank, a temple, a place where the practice of meditation has been successfully carried out by many spiritual seekers, and a solitary place free from ferocious animals and other distractions.

Swami Vivekananda advises:

> Where there is apprehension of fire or water, where the ground is strewn with dry leaves, where there are many ant-hills, where there is danger from wild animals, where four streets meet, where there is too much noise, where there are many wicked persons—there yoga must not be practised. This applies more particularly to India. Do not practise when the body feels very lazy or ill, or when the mind is very miserable and sorrowful. Go to a place which is well hidden and where people do not come to disturb you. Do not choose dirty places. Rather choose beautiful scenery or a room in your own house which is beautiful. When you practise, first salute all the ancient yogis and your own guru and God, and then begin.[5]

Often the aspirant is advised to use a specific carpet or seat for the practice of meditation. The sacred texts and traditions suggest that the seat be made of tiger skin, deer skin, wool, silk, or cotton, that it be used exclusively by the aspirant, and only for the practice of meditation. With regular practices, the prayer seat or carpet absorbs spiritual vibrations and radiates spiritual energy.

According to the *Bhagavad Gita:*

> In a clean spot having fixed his seat—a firm seat, neither too high nor too low—and having spread over it *kusa*-grass, and then a deer skin, and then a cloth, and sitting there, he should practice yoga for the purification of the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> self, restraining the activities of his mind and senses, and bringing his thoughts to a point.... Completely serene and fearless, steadfast in the vow of a *brahmachari*, disciplined in mind, and ever thinking on Me, he should sit in yoga, regarding Me as his Supreme Goal.[6]

Geographical Direction

Which direction should one face during meditation? If God is everywhere, then all places are God's places and all directions are God's directions. Yet in the earlier stages an aspirant needs certain guidelines and formal ceremonial practices. These are likened to fencing around the young plant of our spiritual life. Such fences become unnecessary when the plant grows up in the course of time.

Regarding direction, the meditator is advised to sit facing the east, because the earth's daily rotation is from west to east. By facing east, we face the direction of the motion, as when we ride in a train or car, facing the direction in which it is moving. If one cannot face east while meditating, one is advised to face north, since the magnetic polar current is always flowing from south to north, and by facing north, one faces the direction of the current.

Even when we sleep, if we keep our head to the south, the current passes over us from the head to the feet. In the case of the earth's rotation, we move with the earth; in the case of the polar current, we are more or less stationary and the current flows over us.

Solitude

Meditation is to be practiced in secret and in solitude. As Sri Ramakrishna says: "To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest."[7] A beginner is especially required to isolate himself or herself from the preoccupations of daily life and retire into solitude from time to time. It is extremely difficult to devote one's mind to meditation while living too close to sources of disturbance and distraction; inner seclusion must therefore be sought in the solitude of nature.

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* advises:

> Where the fire is kindled by rubbing, where the air is controlled, where the soma flows over, there a [perfect] mind

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> is created.... In [lonely] places, such as mountain caves, where the floor is even, free from pebbles or sand, free from fire, where there are no disturbing noises from men or waterfalls, in places pleasing to the mind and not painful to the eyes, yoga is to be practised.[8]

Solitude is important because, as stated in the Samkhya philosophy, "Association with many persons creates passion, aversion, and so forth, and is an obstruction to meditation, as with the shell bracelets on the virgin's hand. It is the same even with two [persons]."[9] (The reference, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, is to "a maiden, who wore a number of bracelets on her wrists, [and] was massaging her father in order to put him to sleep. But the friction of the bracelets made a noise, disturbing his rest."[10])

Many people, however, are accustomed to living in the midst of the bustle of everyday life and often find it difficult to find opportunities for solitude or to derive spiritual benefit from it. For them, external solitude, without the support of internal solitude, proves to be suffocating and oppressive. Therefore, a beginner is advised to go into solitude only occasionally, for short periods—for example, one or two days at a time—and gradually to extend such durations of living in solitude. Solitude, as the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi points out, deepens one's spiritual mood:

> If you practice spiritual discipline for some time in a solitary place, you will find that your mind has become strong, and then you can live in any place or society without being in the least affected by it. When the plant is tender, it should be hedged around. But when it has grown big, not even cows and goats can injure it.[11]

Living in solitude calms the mind. It is said that distracting things and situations that are out of sight also tend to drop from the mind. The practice of withdrawal into solitude, however, must be backed up by a spirit of dispassion and prayerfulness, without which a beginner is likely to be taken over by a holiday spirit instead of a meditative mood.

The yogi should always live alone. As stated in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam,* where many dwell in one place, there is the possibility

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

of noise and quarreling. Even where there are only two people there is the possibility of harmful gossip.[12] In the *Uddhava Gita,* Sri Krishna advises Uddhava about the harmful effects of evil company and warns him not only to refrain from associating with sensual people but also to shun the company of those who associate with such people. Such association arouses sensual thought-waves in the mind of the seeker:

> A mental wave is never produced by anything that has not been seen or heard. So the mind of a man who controls his senses is gradually stilled and is perfectly at peace.... Therefore the wise man should shun evil company and associate with the holy. It is these who by their words take away the attachment of the mind.... As a man resorting to the blessed Fire is rid of his cold, fear, and darkness, so also is a man associating with the saints.[13]

That is, he is rid of his mechanical engrossment in rituals, his fear of rebirth, and its cause, ignorance.

The *Bhagavad Gita* also emphasizes living in a solitary place and being alone as favorable conditions for the practice of meditation: "A yogi should always try to concentrate his mind, retiring into solitude and living alone, having subdued his mind and body and got rid of his desires and possessions."[14] The words "solitude," "alone," and "got rid of his desires and possessions" indicate that the life of a *sannyasin* is helpful for the practice of this yoga of meditation.

Purity of Vibrations

The environment or place selected for the practice of meditation must also be pure. A place that is barren, unclean, where holy persons are not honored and adored, and where austerity, charity, and self-control are not practiced is not to be considered pure and is therefore not conducive to the practice of meditation. The purity of a place depends upon the purity of its spiritual vibrations. Vibrations are subtle forms of psychic emissions from people and things, described by the sacred texts of Vedanta as *tanmatras,* and these remain deposited in an environment where people live or spend

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

much of their time. The spiritual purity or impurity of such emissions makes a place pure or impure.

The *Katha Upanishad* says, "Whatever exists in this universe vibrates within the *prana*."[15] *Prana* is the cosmic energy, the vital force in everything. As Swami Vivekananda says:

> It is the Prana that is manifesting as motion; it is the Prana that is manifesting as gravitation, as magnetism. It is the Prana that is manifesting as the actions of the body, as the nerve currents, as thought-force.[16]

Prana is the creative force. Beings and things appear different and diverse in their forms, textures, and qualities because of their differing rates of vibration. Matter and mind are made of the same stuff—*prana*. They differ only in their rates of vibration. Matter is the solidified form of the mind. Each form of matter is like a whirlpool of energy, constantly vibrating. Material objects that appear to be stationary are in reality moving at very low rate of vibration, and what appears to be moving is moving at an intense rate of vibration.

When we are awake, we are in a certain state of vibration; when dreaming we are in another; and in deep sleep we are in still another. Each modification of thought or upheaval of emotions within us represents a particular state of vibration, and for this reason our actions and reactions vary. Whatever we receive through our five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, giving us various perceptions, is all vibrations, and it is because of these different rates of vibration that the same matter appears to be solid, liquid, gaseous, luminous, or ethereal. We cognize only those objects or forms which vibrate at the same rate as we do.

Vibrations can be gross or subtle. While we are able to perceive the gross vibrations through our senses, the subtle vibrations, the *tanmatras*, usually go undetected. We are able to smell the fragrance of a flower because of these *tanmatras* or subtle emissions of energy of the flower.

The sacred texts of Vedanta mention that there are basically three types of vibrations—vibrations of dullness, restlessness, and tranquillity or balance. Through vibrations we are constantly acting upon others and also being acted upon by others. For example, if

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

our body and mind are vibrating with tension, that has a tendency to affect others. Similarly, if our vibrations are of calm, that calmness will be transmitted to others.

The Three *Gunas*

Vibrations vary from person to person because each person is vibrating according to his or her inner nature, or mind, and then releasing these vibrations. According to the sacred texts of Vedanta, all minds, however much they may differ from one another, can be broadly classified into three groups, representing the three *gunas*, or basic modifications of nature: *tamas* (dullness), *rajas* (restlessness), and *sattva* (calmness). The groups are accordingly designated as *tamasika* (dull), *rajasika* (restless), and *sattvika* (calm). The three *gunas* are present in everyone but in different proportions. This differing proportion of *gunas* makes the difference between one person and another. The *tamasika* mind has a predominance of dullness due to inertia; the *rajasika* mind, of restlessness due to passion and desire; and the *sattvika* mind, of calmness because of control and balance. The vibrations of *tamas* are considered impure because *tamas* heightens body awareness and the nonperception of the inner self. The vibrations of *rajas* are known to be worldly because it is the nature of *rajas* to inflate the ego and distort the perception of the self. The vibrations of *sattva* are regarded as pure because they least distort the perception of the self.

Again, the vibrations of a person are never fixed but vary according to situations and circumstances. The same person, when overpowered by *tamas*, gives out vibrations of dullness; when overpowered by *rajas*, vibrations of restlessness; and when guided by *sattva*, vibrations of calmness. The purer the mind, the more sensitive it is to these vibrations.

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna one finds how on one occasion the Master was unable to drink a glass of water brought to him by an apparently pious man, who, on inquiry, was discovered to be leading an impure life. The vibrations of a person's body and mind undergo change as the thoughts and habits of the person change. The more we become committed to a higher goal of life, the easier it becomes for us to change our thoughts and way of life, and also to transform our vibrations.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Regarding spiritual vibrations, Swami Vivekananda observes in his *Raja-Yoga:*

> If you practise yoga, however, says Patanjali, after a while your perceptions will become so fine that you will actually see the tanmatras (spiritual vibrations). For instance, you have heard that every man sheds a certain light about him; every living being emits a certain light, and this, the yogi says, can be seen by him. We do not all see it, but we all throw out these tanmatras, just as a flower continuously sends out the fine particles which enable us to smell it. Every day of our lives we throw out a mass of good or evil, and everywhere we go, the atmosphere is full of these materials. That is how there came to the human mind, unconsciously, the idea of building temples and churches. Why should a man build churches in which to worship God? Why not worship Him anywhere? Even if they did not know the reason, men found that a place where people worshipped God became full of good tanmatras. Every day people go there, and the more they go the holier they get and the holier that place becomes. If any man who has not much sattva in him goes there, the place will influence him and arouse his sattva quality. Here, therefore, is the significance of all temples and holy places; but you must remember that their holiness depends on holy people's congregating there. The difficulty with man is that he forgets the original meaning and puts the cart before the horse. It was men who made these places holy, and then the effect became the cause and made men holy. If the wicked alone were to go there, it would become as bad as any other place. It is not the building, but the people, that make a church; and that is what we always forget. That is why sages and holy persons, who have much of this sattva quality, can send it out and exert a tremendous influence day and night on their surroundings. A man may be so pure that his purity will become tangible. Whosoever comes in contact with him will become pure.... Everything is infectious in this world—good or bad. If your body is in a certain

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> state of tension, it will have a tendency to produce the same tension in others. If you are strong and healthy, those who live near you will also have a tendency to become strong and healthy; but if you are sick and weak, those around you will have a tendency to become the same.[17]

So Swami Vivekananda gives the following directions for the practice of meditation:

> You must practise at least twice every day, and the best times are towards the morning and the evening. When night passes into day, and day into night, a state of relative calmness ensues. The early morning and the early evening are the two periods of calmness. Your body will have a like tendency to become calm at those times. We should take advantage of that natural condition and begin to practise then. Make it a rule not to eat until you have practised; if you do this the sheer force of hunger will break your laziness. In India they teach children never to eat until they have practised or worshipped, and it becomes natural to them after a time; a boy will not feel hungry until he has bathed and practised the disciplines of yoga. Those of you who can afford it should have a room where you can practise alone. Do not sleep in that room; it must be kept holy. You must not enter the room until you have bathed and are perfectly clean in body and mind. Place flowers in that room always—they are the best surroundings for a yogi—and pictures that are pleasing. Burn incense morning and evening. Have no quarrel or anger or unholy thought in that room. Only allow those persons to enter it who are of the same thought as you. Then gradually there will be an atmosphere of holiness in the room, so that when you are miserable, sorrowful, or doubtful, or when your mind is disturbed, if you then enter the room you will find inner peace. This was the real idea behind the temple and the church; and in some temples and churches you will find it even now; but in the majority of them this idea has been lost. The fact is that by preserving spiritual vibrations in a place you make it holy. Those who cannot afford to have

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

a room set apart can practise anywhere they like. Sit in a straight posture. The next thing to do is to send a current of holy thought to all creation. Mentally repeat: "Let all beings be happy; let all beings be peaceful; let all beings be blissful." So do to the east, south, north and west. The more you practice this, the better you will feel. You will find at last that the easiest way to make ourselves healthy is to see that others are healthy, and the easiest way to make ourselves happy is to see that others are happy. After doing that, those who believe in God should pray—not for money, not for health, nor for heaven. Pray for knowledge and light; every other prayer is selfish. Then the next thing to do is to think that your body is firm, strong, and healthy; for it is the best instrument you have. Think of it as being as strong as adamant, and that with the help of this body you will cross the ocean of life. Freedom is never to be reached by the weak; throw away all weakness. Tell your body that it is strong, tell your mind that it is strong, and have unbounded faith and hope in yourself.[18]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

23. *Physical Condition Eating Habits, and Exercise*

Strength of the Body

A healthy body is of vital importance for success in the practice of concentration and meditation. The *Katha Upanishad* says that "the Self cannot be attained by one who is weak, with distracted mind and outgoing sense-organs."[1] The word "weak" here refers to both physical and mental weakness. Only a strong body can bear the shock resulting from control of the sense organs. The ability to withstand the impacts of lust and anger is a sign of success in self-control. But such self-control is not possible if the body is weak. A person of weak body and weak nerves easily falls prey to the upsurges of the baser impulses of mind. Patanjali describes poor health as a major obstacle to the practice of meditation.[2] When the body is weak, it keeps much of the mind pinned down to the physical level. It is said that a strong body obeys, and a weak body commands.

Favorable health very much depends upon diet and eating habits. The mind and body are interrelated, and one influences the other constantly. Any form of imbalance in either of them affects the other adversely. The sacred texts of Vedanta describe the body as a boat, with the help of which a spiritual seeker crosses the ocean of mortality and sorrow.

Both body and mind are material by nature, and as such they are the products of food. According to the sacred texts of Vedanta, our physical body is produced by the combination of the gross elements and consists of flesh, bone, blood, and other substances.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Dependent upon food for its existence, the body endures as long as it can assimilate nourishment. It is material and changeable by nature.

Interior to the physical body, and finer than it, is the mind, which is also material. The mind is the subtle body of the person. Of the food we eat, the grossest part goes to form excrement, the middle part goes to form the blood, and the finest part goes to form the mind. Hence the nature of the food we eat influences the condition of our mind. For example, certain types of food create within us inertia and dullness, others create excitement and passion, and yet others, calmness and tranquillity.

It is therefore evident that certain kinds of food create certain conditions in the body, followed by corresponding changes in the mind. These changes or modifications of mind are three in number and represent the three *gunas*, the basic qualities in nature. When we need rest or sleep, we invoke the mood of *tamas;* in times of activity, we invoke *rajas*, the mood of energy, strength, and enthusiasm; and when it is time for prayer and meditation, we invoke *sattva*, the mood of calmness and serenity. The ideal is to be able to control the *gunas* according to our need and not to be controlled by them, and this is what is meant by self-control.

The *guna* of *tamas* increases dullness or darkness of mind by heightening our awareness of the body. *Rajas* excites the body and mind, inflaming passions and desires, while *sattva* brings serenity by stimulating the spiritual urges within us. *Tamas* leads to non-perception of our true Self, *rajas* to distorted perception, and *sattva* to clarity of perception. When one *guna* dominates, the other two remain subdued.

The *guna* structure of each individual influences his or her preferences for diet. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says:

> Food that promotes longevity, vitality, strength, health, pleasure, appetite, and that is succulent, oleaginous, substantial, and agreeable, is favoured by people endowed with sattva. Food that is excessively bitter, sour, salty, hot, acrid, dry, and burning is liked by people endowed with rajas. It causes pain, grief, and disease. And food that is ill cooked, tasteless, putrid, stale, unclean, and left over, is favored by people endowed with tamas.[3]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The *guna* structure not only determines an individual's preference for food but also influences his or her personality traits, religious views, and habits of dress. A person of predominantly *tamasika* mind is careless and clumsy by nature; is superstitious and narrow in religious views; likes food that is improper and unwholesome; and is disproportionate and often uncouth in choice of dress. A person having a *rajasika* mind is unsteady and domineering by nature; is bigoted, aggressive, and ostentatious in matters of religion; likes food that is rich, heavy, exciting, and alluring to the senses; and chooses dress that is gaudy, colorful, and showy. A person of *sattvika* mind is by nature steady, calm, and thorough; is universal and tolerant in the understanding of religion; likes wholesome, mild, and fresh food in moderate amounts; and chooses dress that is clean, neat, and modest. Since the *guna* structure of our mind affects our choice of food and dress and influences our general outlook on life, by consciously changing those factors, we are able to alter and control the moods of our mind. Of these factors, food is the most important, because the quality of food determines the quality of the mind.

Regarding influence of food over the mind, the *Chhandogya Upanishad* says: "When the food *(ahara)* is pure, the *sattva* element gets purified and the memory becomes unwavering."[4] Food provides the material out of which every human form is manufactured, and it is the predominance of pure *(sattvika)* material that is absolutely necessary for spiritual development. As Sri Ramakrishna says: "Sattva preserves, rajas creates, and tamas destroys."[5] Purity of food is therefore vital for a spiritual aspirant.

Purity of food is considered from three points of view: qualitative purity, material purity, and spiritual purity. According to Ramanuja, a great teacher of Vedanta, there are three kinds of impurity in food that we must avoid. The first is called the impurity of *jati,* or the nature of the food. There are certain kinds of food that are considered to be impure by nature. These include all exciting food such as onion and garlic; food that is left over, stale, or foul-smelling; food of which the natural juices have almost dried up; and also items of food that have been procured by causing injury and cruelty to other living beings.

The second impurity to be avoided is the contamination of *nimitta.* This refers to those foods that have been contaminated by

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

dirt, bacteria, saliva, or other secretions or that have been partially eaten by someone else.

The third kind of impurity in food is the pollution of *ashraya*, or moral and spiritual impurity. Regarding this, the sacred traditions of Vedanta maintain that every person emits a certain kind of aura or vibration, and that a part of that person's influence is left upon and affects whatever he or she touches. Therefore, even though some food may be qualitatively and materially pure, it can become impure when it is cooked, handled, or served by a wicked, immoral, or impure person. A spiritual aspirant is advised to avoid the company of such persons as well as food served by them.

The verse of the *Chhandogya Upanishad* quoted above has been commented upon by Shankaracharya, the great exponent of nondualistic Vedanta, who gives an entirely different meaning to the word *ahara*, interpreted by Ramanuja as "food." According to Shankaracharya:

> That which is gathered in is Ahara. The knowledge of the sensations, such as sound, etc., is gathered in for the enjoyment of the enjoyer (self); the purification of the knowledge which gathers in the perception of the senses is the purifying of the food (Ahara). The word "purification of food" means the acquiring of the knowledge of sensations untouched by the defects of attachment, aversion, and delusion; such is the meaning. Therefore such knowledge or Ahara being purified, the Sattva material of the possessor of it—the internal organ—will become purified, and the Sattva being purified, an unbroken memory of the Infinite One, who has been known in His real nature from scriptures, will result.[6]

Commenting upon the two views, Swami Vivekananda says:

> It is quite natural to say that Shankara's meaning is the best, but I wish to add that one should not neglect Ramanuja's interpretation either. It is only when you take care of the real material food that the rest will come. It is very true that the mind is the master, but very few of us are not bound by the senses. We are all controlled by matter; and as long as we are

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> so controlled, we must take material aids; and then, when we have become strong, we can eat or drink anything we like. We have to follow Ramanuja in taking care about food and drink; at the same time we must also take care about our mental food. It is very easy to take care about material food, but mental work must go along with it; then gradually our spiritual self will become stronger and stronger and the physical self less assertive. Then will food hurt you no more. The great danger is that every man wants to jump at the highest ideal, but jumping is not the way. That ends only in a fall. We are bound down here, and we have to break our chains slowly. This is called Viveka, discrimination.[7]

Overemphasis on the question of food can and does lead to extreme forms of fanaticism. That which is merely a means to spiritual enlightenment becomes the goal. Passions run high around the question of food and how it should be cooked, served, and eaten. So Swami Vivekananda warns us about the danger of losing sight of the very goal of the purification of food:

> The manipulating and controlling of what may be called the finer body, viz., the mind, are no doubt higher functions than the controlling of the grosser body of flesh. But the control of the grosser is absolutely necessary to enable one to arrive at the control of the finer. The beginner, therefore, must pay particular attention to all such dietetic rules as have come down from the line of his accredited teachers; but the extravagant, meaningless fanaticism, which has driven religion entirely to the kitchen, as may be noticed in the case of many of our sects, without any hope of the noble truth of that religion ever coming out to the sunlight of spirituality, is a peculiar sort of pure and simple materialism. It is neither Jnana, nor Bhakti, nor Karma; it is a special kind of lunacy, and those who pin their souls to it are more likely to go to lunatic asylums than to Brahmaloka [the heavenly realms]. So it stands to reason that discrimination in the choice of food is necessary for the attainment of this higher state of mental composition which cannot be easily obtained otherwise.[8]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The Question of Vegetarianism

Opinions differ on the question of the purity of food. There are some who maintain that food, in order to be pure, must be vegetarian. In support of this view, they give the following justification: First, vegetarian food is spiritually pure because it is procured without causing injury to any living creature. Second, vegetarian food is wholesome, easily digestible, nontoxic, and not stimulating to the passions and emotions. Third, vegetarian food is known to be more favorable for developing strength of the nerves, from which comes the power of endurance so essential for the practice of self-control and other spiritual disciplines. Fourth, nonvegetarian food is injurious to the digestive organs and arouses cravings for intoxicants, and is therefore unhealthful and impure.

There are others who disagree with these contentions and put forward the following arguments: First, strict adherence to the principle of nonviolence in the procurement of food is never possible. Even the vegetables we eat have life, and millions of microbes die when we drink a glass of water or inhale a breath of air. Such violence, however imperceptible, is nonetheless violence. Second, merely eating a vegetarian diet cannot make a person spiritual unless that person has spiritual longing. It is said that if a cobra is fed only with milk, it will still produce nothing but poison. Third, there are those for whom fish and meat are natural staples in their diet because of heredity, cultural background, geographic conditions, and physical needs. Such persons, unaccustomed to drawing nourishment from vegetarian food, are likely to suffer from physical and mental weakness if a vegetarian diet is forced upon them. Fourth, even food that is not by nature exciting to the senses can become so when prepared with rich and exciting ingredients. For example, vegetarian food, when heavily spiced to make it more palatable, becomes no less exciting than nonvegetarian food.

There is a third opinion that seeks to reconcile the two opposing views and leaves the choice of food to the individual. According to this view, what food will benefit a person physically or spiritually depends upon the temperament, tastes, habits, and needs of the individual. There are some for whom vegetarian food is natural; there are others who would be adversely affected by such a diet. A purely vegetarian diet may be beneficial to those who lead an exclu-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

sively spiritual life, but the vast majority, who make spiritual endeavors along with worldly activities, need a balanced approach to diet. Prescribing one kind of food for all is not the answer to the question of food, as this would be neither desirable nor possible.

Regarding this controversy, Swami Vivekananda observes:

> One party says that those that take animal food suffer from all sorts of bodily complaints. The other contradicts this and says, "That is all fiction. If that were true, then the Hindus would have been the healthiest race, and the powerful nations, such as the English, the Americans, and others, whose principal food is meat, would have succumbed to all sorts of maladies and ceased to exist by this time." One says that the flesh of the goat makes the intellect like that of the goat, the flesh of the swine like that of the swine, and fish like that of the fish. The other declares that it can as well be argued then that the potato makes a potato-like brain, that vegetables make a vegetable brain—resembling dull and dead matter. Is it not better to have the intelligence of a living animal than to have the brain dull and inert like dead matter? One party says that those things which are in the chemical composition of animal food are also equally present in the vegetables. The other ridicules it and exclaims, "Why, they are in the air too. Go then and live on air only." One argues that the vegetarians are very painstaking and can go through hard and long sustained labour. The other says, "If that were true, then the vegetarian nations would occupy the foremost rank, which is not the case, the strongest and foremost nations being always those that take animal food."... The Shastras also differ, and rather confuse one, on this point. In one place the Shastra dictates, "Kill animals in Yajnas," and again, in another place it says, "Never take away life." The Hindus hold that it is a sin to kill animals except in sacrifices, but one can with impunity enjoy the pleasure of eating meat after the animal is sacrificed in a Yajna....
>
> In the West, the contention is whether animal food is injurious to health or not, whether it is more strengthening

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

than vegetable diet or not, and so on.... One party says, "Indigestion is due to animal food." The other says, "That is all stuff and nonsense. It is mostly the vegetarians who suffer from stomach complaints." Again, "It may be the vegetable food acts as an effective purgative to the system. But is that any reason that you should induce the whole world to take it?"...

After carefully scrutinizing all sides of the question and setting aside all fanaticism that is rampant on this delicate question of food, I must say that my conviction tends to confirm this view—that the Hindus are, after all, right; I mean that injunction of the Hindu Shastras which lays down the rule that food, like many other things, must be different according to the difference of birth and profession; this is the sound conclusion.[9]

Continuing on the question of food, Swami Vivekananda says:

To eat meat is surely barbarous and vegetable food is certainly purer—who can deny that? For him [the yogi] surely is a strict vegetarian diet whose one end is to lead solely a spiritual life. But he who has to steer the boat of his life with strenuous labor through the constant life-and-death struggles and the competition of this world must of necessity take meat. So long as there will be in human society such a thing as the triumph of the strong over the weak, animal food is required, or some other suitable substitute for it has to be discovered; otherwise, the weak will naturally be crushed under the feet of the strong. It will not do to quote solitary instances of the good effect of vegetable food on some particular person or persons: compare one nation with another and then draw conclusions. The vegetarians, again, are also divided amongst themselves. Some say that rice, potatoes, wheat, barley, maize, and other starchy foods are of no use; these have been produced by man, and are the source of all maladies. Starchy food which generates sugar in the system is most injurious to health. Even horses and cows become sickly and diseased if kept

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

within doors and fed on wheat and rice; but they get well again if allowed to graze freely on the tender and growing herbage in the meadows. There is very little starchy substance in grass and other green edible herbs. The orangutan eats grass and nuts and does not usually eat potato and wheat, but if he ever does so, he eats them before they are ripe, i.e., when there is not much starch in them. Others say that taking roast meat and plenty of fruit and milk is best suited to the attainment of longevity. More especially, they who take much fruit regularly do not soon lose their youth, as the acid of fruit dissolves the foul crust formed on the bones which is mainly the cause of bringing on old age. All these contentions have no end; they are going on unceasingly. Now the judicious view admitted by all in regard to this vexed question is to take such food as is substantial and nutritious and, at the same time, easily digested. The food should be such as contains the greatest nutriment in the smallest compass, and be at the same time quickly assimilable; otherwise, it has necessarily to be taken in large quantity, and consequently the whole day is required only to digest it. If all the energy is spent only in digesting food, what will there be left to do other works?[10]

Nonviolence

Regarding nonviolence *(ahimsa)*, which is often invoked as a justification for vegetarianism, Swami Vivekananda says:

> The test of ahimsa (non-violence) is absence of jealousy. Any man may do a good deed, or make a good gift on the spur of the moment or under the pressure of some superstition or priestcraft; but the real lover of mankind is he who is jealous of none. The so-called great men of the world are seen to become jealous of each other for a small name, for a little fame, and for a few bits of gold. So long as this jealousy exists in a heart, it is far away from the perfection of ahimsa. The cow does not eat meat, nor does the sheep. Are they great yogis, great non-injurers? Any fool may abstain from eating this or that; surely that gives him

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> no more distinction than the herbivorous animals. The man who will mercilessly cheat widows and orphans, and do the vilest deeds for money, is worse than any brute, even if he lives entirely on grass. The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy—that man is a bhakta, he is a yogi, he is the guru of all, even though he lives every day of his life on the flesh of swine. Therefore we must always remember that external practices have value only as they help to develop internal purity. It is better to have internal purity alone, when minute attention to external observances is not practicable. But woe unto the man and woe unto the nation that forgets the real, internal, spiritual essentials of religion and mechanically clutches with death-like grasp all external forms and never lets them go! The forms have value only so far as they are the expressions of the life within. If they have ceased to express life, crush them out without mercy.[11]

The essential message is that food for the spiritual seeker must be pure, both physically and psychically, because purity of mind is dependent upon purity of food. Yet what counts most is not the food but the seeker's spiritual longing, which is the goal of all spiritual observances and practices. Food never made anyone spiritual, and it can never do so. Spiritual longing is something that cannot be generated by mechanical means. Pure food is a help only to one who is already endowed with spiritual longing. So long as the seeker feels this longing, the question of food is secondary. As Sri Ramakrishna says: "Blessed is he who feels longing for God, though he eats pork. But shame on him whose mind dwells on 'lust and greed' though he eats the purest food—boiled vegetables, rice, and ghee."[12]

Sri Ramakrishna warned his disciples against taking food related to the *shraddha* ceremony, or funeral obsequies. The Master considered such food harmful to devotion. Explaining the meaning of this warning, Swami Saradananda, a disciple of the Master, says:

> The object of food is to build a strong body and a fine intellect. Unless the body and the mind are pure, it is not possible to go through spiritual practices. It is the food offered

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> to God that builds a pure body and mind. The *shraddha* food is offered to the manes and not to God, and as a result, instead of building a pure mind and body, it affects people otherwise. Food builds the body and the mind, and the nature of food also affects them. In Sri Chaitanya's life we have a case where an ordinary man who happened to touch him in a state of ecstasy was overpowered by religious emotions. He was advised to take *shraddha* food to get over these emotions, and as a matter of fact this food did put an end to that person's ecstatic moods.[13]

"Food plays an important part in creating inner purity. One must not, Holy Mother advised, eat food that has not been offered to God. 'As your food is,' she said, 'so will your blood be. From pure blood you will get bodily strength and a pure mind. A pure mind begets ecstatic love for God.'"[14]

Eating Habits

Yet purity of food alone is not enough. There is the question of eating habits, and that too must be taken into consideration. For the spiritual seeker, both food and eating habits must be pure. Eating habits are considered pure when they are moderate and controlled. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says:

> Yoga is not for him who eats too much nor for him who eats too little. It is not for him, O Arjuna, who sleeps too much nor for him who sleeps too little.* For him who is temperate in his food and recreation, temperate in his exertion at work, temperate in sleep and waking, yoga puts an end to all sorrows.[15]

Swami Vidyaranya, in his *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka*, mentions the following as the causes of inertia:

> Incomplete sleep, indigestion, overeating, and physical exertion are the causes of inactivity *(laya)*. Therefore, it is said thus:

*According to the books on Yoga, a yogi should fill half his stomach with food and one quarter with water, and leave one quarter for the movement of air.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> "He should eat easily digestible food sparingly and complete the sleep, avoiding labour, desireless and without exertion should always sit in a place which is solitary and free from disturbances; or he should control the vital breath in the way he is accustomed to do" (*Saubhagyalaksmi Upanisad*, 2.2).[16]

According to Manu, "Overeating is not conducive to health, long life, or heaven; it destroys merit and people hate it; therefore it should be avoided."[17] Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Eat as much as you like during the day, but eat sparingly at night." Swami Brahmananda, the eminent disciple of the Master, explains the meaning of these words:

> The idea is that the full meal taken at noon will be easily digested, and if you eat lightly at night, your body will remain light and you can easily concentrate the mind. A heavy meal at night produces laziness and sleep. How do you want to spend the night—in sleep or in meditation? People are generally busy during the day, so it is difficult to still the restless mind at that time. But at night nature becomes calm and all creatures go to sleep. This, therefore, is the best time for meditation. Concentration becomes easily intensified in the quiet hours of the night.... The glutton who has no restraint over his palate injures his body and mind. Whenever he gets some choice food, he overeats and then suffers from breathing difficulty. His whole energy is spent in digesting that food, and if he cannot digest it, he falls ill. Foods like onion, garlic, and chili excite the body and mind so much that later one finds it extremely difficult to bring the system under control. I think that those who want to lead a spiritual life should pay special attention to what they eat and drink. Don't overeat. Eat that food which is nutritious, easily digested and not exciting. Avoid stimulating food because it is injurious, and also avoid that food which increases lethargy *(tamas)*. What is the purpose of food? To maintain good health. And one needs good health for God-realization.[18]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Discrimination with regard to food and moderation in eating are very much connected with mastery over the senses. As Swami Turiyananda, another disciple of the Master, observes:

> All trouble is over if the palate and the sex impulse are conquered. When Sri Chaitanya went to Keshava Bharati for initiation into *sannyasa,* the latter remarked, "You are in the bloom of youth and so surpassingly handsome. Who will be bold enough to initiate you into *sannyasa?*" Sri Chaitanya replied, "Sir, you usually examine an aspirant before conferring *sannyasa* on him. If you find me qualified, you will naturally be inclined to initiate me also. So please examine me and see if I am fit for it." Bharati said to Sri Chaitanya, "Put out your tongue." On the disciple's putting out his tongue, the guru put some sugar on it. The sugar was left as it was, without being moistened in the least, and was scattered in the air the moment it was blown out. There was no more need to examine the sexual instinct. "A man who has controlled all other senses except the palate is not to be considered a master of his senses. When the hankering of the palate is controlled, everything else is controlled" (*Bhagavata*, 11.8.21).... Unless the senses are brought under control there cannot be any spiritual progress. So the *Bhagavad Gita* repeatedly says: "Therefore, O best of the Bharatas, control thou the senses first, and thereby kill this sinful propensity of lust, which destroys one's Knowledge and Realization."[19]

Moderation

Regarding the need for moderation in both diet and exercise, Swami Vivekananda wrote:

> There is the great question of food and exercise.... The food must be simple and taken several times [a day] instead of once or twice. Never get very hungry. "He who eats too much cannot be a yogi. He who fasts too much cannot be a yogi. He who sleeps too much cannot be a yogi, nor he

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

who keeps awake too much." He who does not do any work and he who works too hard cannot succeed. Proper food, proper exercise, proper sleep, proper wakefulness—these are necessary for any success. What the proper food is, what kind, we have to determine ourselves. Nobody can determine that [for us]. As a general practice, we have to shun exciting food.... We do not know how to vary our diet with our occupation. We always forget that it is the food out of which we manufacture everything we have. So the amount and kind of energy that we want, the food must determine. Violent exercises are not at all necessary.... If you want to be muscular, Yoga is not for you. You have to manufacture a finer organism than you have now. Violent exercises are positively hurtful.... Live amongst those who do not take too much exercise. If you do not take violent exercise, you will live longer. You do not want to burn out your lamp in muscles! People who work with their brains are the longest-lived people.... Do not burn the lamp quickly. Let it burn slowly and gently.... Every anxiety, every violent exercise—physical and mental—[means] you are burning the lamp. The proper diet means, generally, simply do not eat highly spiced foods. There are three sorts of mind, says the Yogi, according to the elements of nature. One is the dull mind, which covers the luminosity of the soul. Then there is that which makes people active, and lastly, that which makes them calm and peaceful. Now there are persons born with the tendency to sleep all the time. Their taste will be towards that type of food which is rotting—crawling cheese. They will eat cheese that fairly jumps off the table. It is a natural tendency with them. Then active people. Their taste is for everything hot and pungent, strong alcohol.... Sattvika people are very thoughtful, quiet, and patient. They take food in small quantities, and never anything bad. I am always asked the question "Shall I give up meat?" My Master said, "Why should you give up anything? It will give you up." Do not give up anything in nature. Make it so hot for nature that she will give you up. There will come a time when you cannot possibly eat meat.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The very sight of it will disgust you. There will come a time when many things you are struggling to give up will be distasteful, positively loathsome.[20]

As mentioned above, the *Bhagavad Gita* also exhorts:

For him who is temperate in his food and recreation, temperate in his exertion at work, temperate in sleep and waking, yoga puts an end to all sorrows.[21]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

24. *Self-Analysis*

Negation through self-analysis is one of several time-honored methods of invoking concentration of mind for meditation. The method is subjective and relies on reason and persuasion, accompanied by the rigorous practices of four disciplines: discrimination between the Real and the unreal, dispassion toward sense objects, control of the mind and the senses, and intense yearning for liberation.

The method is used especially by those who meditate on the Ultimate Reality as formless Absolute. By this method, the seeker attempts not so much to control the mind as to reduce everything to the oneness of the all-pervading Absolute. The individual self is seen as the focus of the Absolute, the Supreme Self, called Brahman in the Upanishads. For those who meditate on some specific form of a Personal God, such a form is regarded as merely a symbol of Brahman. Either form of meditation culminates in Self-Knowledge, which is the direct realization of the identity of the individual self and the all-pervading Supreme Self.

That which stands in the way of Self-Knowledge is ignorance. Ignorance gives rise to ego, or I-consciousness: ego distorts the vision and polarizes individual consciousness. As a result, an individual becomes cut off from the world of Reality and slips into a world of illusion.

The perception of diversity is simply an illusion of the individual mind. It is this illusion that creates countless attachments and aversions, fancies and fantasies. Attachment first taints the intellect, then the mind and the senses, then the body. Intellectual attachment

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

leads to emotional attachment, and emotional attachment leads to biochemical attachment. Mere abstinence or the practice of austerities cannot and does not root out attachment unless the things craved for are realized by the discriminating intellect to be utterly false and distasteful. And that distaste never comes until the Self is known to be the Reality of all realities. The *Bhagavad Gita* says: "The objects of the senses fall away from a man practicing abstinence, but not the taste for them. But even the taste falls away when the Supreme is seen."[1] Our doubts cannot be silenced by blind acceptance of myths and legends or doctrines and dogmas. Doubts are dispelled only by the certainty of inner conviction based on positive reasoning and burning experience. As Shankaracharya says:

> By adequate reasoning the conviction of the reality about the rope is gained, which puts an end to the great fear and misery caused by the snake worked up in the deluded mind [which took the rope to be a snake]. The conviction of the Truth is seen to proceed from reasoning upon the salutary counsel of the wise, and not by bathing in the sacred waters, nor by giving gifts, nor by a hundred *pranayamas* (control of the vital force).[2]

The intellect does not give up its attachment to false and fanciful things until it awakens to the knowledge of Reality. Darkness vanishes only with the dawning of day; similarly, illusion disappears only when Truth is known. The snake that one imagines when seeing a piece of rope in semidarkness never goes away until light falls on it. The torments of a person having a nightmare never end until he wakes up. Knowledge is that awakening. Knowledge is both fire and light. It burns up all that is false and imaginary, and it also reveals that which is really real. So Shankaracharya says: "As fire is the direct cause of cooking, so Knowledge, and not any other form of discipline, is the direct cause of Liberation; for Liberation cannot be attained without Knowledge."[3]

Negation and Affirmation

The method of self-analysis is a two-way practice: negation and affirmation. First the seeker tries to separate his individual self from all diversities by negating them as mere superimpositions of the deluded

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

mind. Simultaneously he affirms that his individual self is the only reality and that it is the focus of the universal Self, the common Self of all beings and things. This is known as the process of *neti, neti.* In the words of Sri Ramakrishna:

> First of all you must discriminate, following the method of "Neti, neti": "He is not the five elements, nor the sense-organs, nor the mind, nor the intelligence, nor the ego. He is beyond all these cosmic principles." You want to climb to the roof; then you must eliminate and leave behind all the steps, one by one. The steps are by no means the roof. But after reaching the roof you find that the steps are made of the same materials—brick, lime, and brick-dust—as the roof. It is the Supreme Brahman that has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. That which is Atman has become the five elements.[4]

The superimpositions are the accumulated deposits of Self-forgetfulness that have developed into different layers of embodiment—the body, mind, and ego. Actually, these are all layers of ego, made up of attitudes, motives, values, and self-identity. Derived from the environment and biochemical and hormonal processes, they determine our likes and dislikes, love and hatred, gain and loss, fulfillment and frustration. By the process of negation, we free ourselves from these various superimpositions.

Shankaracharya outlines the process of self-analysis:

> Give up the identification with this lump of flesh, the gross body, as well as with the ego or the subtle body, which are both imagined by the *buddhi.* Realizing thy own Self, which is Knowledge Absolute and not to be denied in the past, present or future, attain to Peace. Cease to identify thyself with family, lineage, name, form, and order of life, which pertain to the body that is like a rotten corpse (to a man of realization). Similarly, giving up ideas of agency and so forth, which are attributes of the subtle body, be the Essence of Bliss Absolute.[5]

Following the above process, the seeker begins to disentangle himself from the various layers of his ego by shifting his self-identity

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

to his true Self, the focus of the all-pervading Supreme Self. By regularly repeating this process of self-analysis, the seeker's mind in course of time develops a very deep attachment for the Supreme Self. This deep attachment is the forerunner of concentration and absorption.

For the seeker, meditation is digging deep within by cutting through the formations of ego, layer after layer, until he reaches his brightly shining true Self. Each time he digs and goes deeper, he comes nearer to that Self, and that nearness transforms his vision and perception of reality. He begins to experience the world differently. Things and beings that before appeared disparate and diverse now stand united and homogeneous. The extent of this transformation is in proportion to the depth he reaches. Just as there is no other means to reach a treasure hidden beneath the earth except by digging, so also there is no other method to discover our true Self except by digging deep within.

Methods of Analysis and Negation

The sacred texts and traditions of Vedanta mention the following practices of self-analysis and negation for the purpose of gathering the mind for meditation:

1. thinking of the indwelling self as a flaming fire
2. the process of watchful waiting
3. the process of conscious withdrawal
4. thinking of the pure self as the master dwelling within
5. passing through the three states of consciousness
6. negation of the five sheaths
7. identifying oneself with the Cosmic Being
8. invoking thoughts of dispassion

Thinking of the Indwelling Self as a Flaming Fire

The seeker thinks of the Self in the inner recess of his heart as a flaming fire of knowledge and makes an offering in that fire of all his desires and attachments, vagaries and fancies, practices of self-control and austerities. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> Some yogis offer oblations to the *devas* alone, while others in the fire of Brahman offer the self by the self. Some offer oblations of hearing and the other senses in the fires of restraint; and some offer sound and other sensations in the fires of their senses. Some, again, offer all the actions of the senses and the functions of the prana as oblations in the fire of self-control, kindled by knowledge.... To him [the person of wisdom] Brahman is the offering and Brahman is the oblation, and it is Brahman who offers the oblation in the fire of Brahman. Brahman alone is attained by him who thus sees Brahman in action.[6]

The Process of Watchful Waiting

One of the characteristics of the human mind is that it does not like to be watched. It stops wandering when it is monitored. So Swami Vivekananda says:

> Before we can control the mind we must study it. We have to seize this unstable mind and drag it from its wanderings and fix it on one idea. Over and over again this must be done. By power of will we must get hold of the mind and make it stop and reflect upon the glory of God. The easiest way to get hold of the mind is to sit quiet and let it drift where it will for a while. Hold fast to the idea, "I am the witness watching my mind drifting. The mind is not I." Then see it think as if it were a thing entirely apart from yourself. Identify yourself with God, never with matter or with the mind. Picture the mind as a calm lake stretched before you and the thoughts that come and go as bubbles rising and breaking on its surface. Make no effort to control the thoughts, but watch them and follow them in imagination as they float away. This will gradually lessen the circles. For the mind ranges over wide circles of thought and those circles widen out into ever-increasing circles, as in a pond when we throw a stone into it. We want to reverse the process and starting with a huge circle make it narrower, until at last we can fix the mind on one point and make it stay there. Hold to the idea, "I am not the mind, I

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> see that I am thinking, I am watching my mind act," and each day the identification of yourself with thought and feeling will grow less, until at last you can entirely separate yourself from the mind and actually know it to be apart from yourself. When this is done, the mind is your servant to control as you will. The first stage of being a yogi is to go beyond the senses. When the mind is conquered, he has reached the highest stage.[7]

Following the above process, the seeker learns to watch the procession of events, outside and inside, from a distance, as it were. He enjoys everything as a witness without being emotionally involved. Being free from the fever of ego, he attains tranquillity of mind.

The Process of Conscious Withdrawal

Conscious withdrawal is the process of gradually dissolving everything into the absolute Pure Consciousness. All that is perceived as gross is reduced to the subtle, and then the subtle to the causal, and finally the individual consciousness to the universal Consciousness. The *Katha Upanishad* outlines this process of gradual withdrawal: "The wise man should merge his speech in his mind, and his mind in his intellect. He should merge his intellect in the Cosmic Mind, and the Cosmic Mind in the Tranquil Self."[8]

Thus the activities of the senses should be stopped and the attention directed to the mind. Then the mind should be drawn into the *buddhi*, or discriminative faculty. Next the aspirant should sink the *buddhi* into the Cosmic Mind. In other words, he should make his mind as pure as the Cosmic Mind, which is free from all notions of discrete individuality. Last, the seeker should go beyond the barrier of the Cosmic Mind and merge in the Absolute, which is calm because of an utter absence of any distinction or difference either with regard to others or within Itself. Following this process, the seeker merges his individuality into the all-pervading Supreme Self.

Thinking of the Pure Self as the Master Dwelling Within

The *Katha Upanishad* describes our body as a chariot and the Self as the master of the chariot:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> Know the *atman* [the Self] to be the master of the chariot; the body, the chariot; the *buddhi* [the intellect], the charioteer; and the mind, the reins. The senses [the five organs of perception and the five organs of action], they say, are the horses; the objects, the roads. The wise call the *atman*—united with the body, the senses, and the mind—the enjoyer.[9]

The *Bhagavad Gita* compares our body to a city of nine gates in which the Self resides:

> The embodied soul who has subdued his senses, having renounced all actions with a discerning mind, dwells happily in the city of nine gates, neither working nor causing work to be done.[10]

The nine gates are the two eyes, the two nostrils, the two ears, the mouth, and the organs of evacuation and generation. The seeker, in order to gather his mind to concentration, may think of his identity as pure Self dwelling within his body as the serene and unconcerned witness consciousness.

Passing through the Three States of Consciousness

Following the practice of passing through the three states of consciousness, the seeker first detaches himself from the sense-perceived external world of the waking state by shutting the doors of his senses and voluntarily passes into the world of memories, or the dream state. Then, by detaching himself from the dream state, he reaches the state of deep sleep. And finally he passes beyond that state, too, and reaches the fourth dimension of his being, known as *Turiya*—our true Self, the detached witness consciousness of the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

No experience, illusory or otherwise, can exist without a substratum. The mirage cannot exist without the desert. The waves and bubbles cannot exist without the ocean. Likewise, the three states and all the experiences in those states subside into *Turiya,* their substratum.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Negation of the Five Sheaths

The seeker looks upon the true Self as light within, surrounded by five sheaths that conceal it as a shade covers the light of a lamp. The sheaths, according to Vedanta, are the physical body; *prana,* or the vital air; *manas,* or the mind; *buddhi,* or the intellect; and the sheath of bliss. They are all sheaths because they conceal our true Self. They are figuratively described as one inside the other in a telescopic manner, the sheath of the body being the outermost and the sheath of bliss being the innermost. The sheaths range from gross to finer to finest. The closer to the center the sheath is, the finer it is. The light of Atman, our true Self, shines through all the sheaths, though in varying degrees because of their varying densities. The seeker reasons that all the sheaths are material by nature, and they appear real because Atman is their substratum. They are separate and different from Atman, the only abiding Reality in us. By the process of detachment from the sheaths and uninterrupted meditation on the Self, the seeker realizes that Atman is untouched by the five sheaths and untainted by any superimposition of the deluded mind. The seeker recognizes that the sheaths are material by nature and are separate and different from his true Self. He detaches himself from them.

Identifying Oneself with the Cosmic Being

In the process of identifying oneself with the Cosmic Being, the seeker thinks that his body is part of the Cosmic Body (Virata Purusha), his life force *(prana)* is part of the Cosmic Energy that vibrates in the universe as the life principle, his mind is part of the Cosmic Mind *(Hiranyagarbha)*, and his soul is a focus of the Cosmic Spirit, or the all-pervading pure Self.

Invoking Thoughts of Dispassion

The seeker sees the various defects of sense objects and sense enjoyments and persuades his mind to withdraw from them. Bhartrihari, the poet-saint, describes such thoughts in his *Vairagya Satakam* (One Hundred Verses on Dispassion):

> In our periods of health we are alarmed by the fear of disease; in the pride we take in our family by the fear of a

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

sudden fall; in wealth by the fear of grasping rulers; in honour by the fear of degradation; in power by the fear of enemies; in beauty by the fear of old age; in our knowledge of the scriptures by the fear of controversy; in virtue by the fear of evil; and in our body by the fear of death. Everything on earth gives cause for fear, and the only freedom from fear is to be found in the renunciation of all desire.[11]

The seeker may profit from the teachings of Shankaracharya:

Boast not of youth or friends or wealth;
Swifter than eyes can wink, by Time
Each one of these is stolen away.
Abjure the illusion of the world
And join yourself to timeless Truth.
Give up the curse of lust and wrath;
Give up delusion, give up greed;
Remember who you really are.
Fools are they that are blind to Self;
Cast into hell, they suffer there.[12]

Longing for the pleasures of the senses is the principal cause of mental distraction. But perceiving the pain that is also associated with all sensual pleasures allows one to achieve indifference to such pleasures. At that point the senses can be directed to the inmost Self for a glimpse of the Divine.

From the materialistic point of view, life in the world, in spite of its many dark shadows, is worthwhile; but for the spiritual seeker, such a life, unillumined by the light of Self-Knowledge, brings only sorrow and suffering. As the *Bhagavad Gita* aptly says: "In that which is night to all beings, the man of self-control is awake; and where all beings are awake, there is night for the *muni* [sage given to meditation and contemplation] who sees."[13]

The pleasure-seeking worldly people look upon the *muni* practicing self-control as abnormal and his practice as life denying. But self-control is the message of the saints and sages of all times. The call for self-control is a call for sanity and sobriety.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

25. *Mystic Worship*

Mystic worship is another effective way of invoking concentration of mind for meditation. The method is especially helpful for those seekers whose Ishtam, or object of meditation, is a form of the Divine or a God-man. Mystic worship is the mental worship of the Ishtam in the heart following some prescribed ceremonies and observances, which create the mental atmosphere and spiritual mood necessary for concentration. It helps to establish an intimate contact between the worshipper and the worshipped. Ceremonies and observances, although they vary from one tradition to another, all have the same purpose: the invocation of the spiritual mood.

Mystic worship is considered a form of contemplation that gradually culminates in meditation. Meditation is keeping the mind focused on the Ishtam uninterruptedly, while contemplation is thinking about the Ishtam. If the Ishtam is a God-man, the seeker lovingly remembers his life story with its various events. The mind in the state of contemplation may be compared to a bee that is hovering above a flower and is about to light on it to sip honey. In the state of meditation, the bee of the mind is already seated on the flower and sipping the honey. Swami Vivekananda says:

> He, the Lord of the universe, is in every one. There is but one temple—the body. It is the only temple that ever existed. In this body, He resides, the Lord of souls and the King of Kings.[1]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

While performing mystic worship, the seeker regards his body as a temple of the Lord and his heart as the altar. After bathing and putting on clean clothes, the seeker takes his seat for meditation. First he thinks that his Ishtam is seated before him, graciously looking at him and pleased to accept his worship. Then he prays to his Chosen Ideal to remove all obstacles, physical and mental, that beset his practice of concentration. He mentally performs some worship to purify his meditation seat, his body, and the different quarters. He then thinks that he is surrounded by an impenetrable wall of fire, guarding him against all distractions. Thereupon he worships the divine form of his Chosen Ideal with various offerings, such as a seat, words of welcome, water, clothing, fruits, flowers, sandalwood paste, incense, light, fanning, ringing of a bell, chanting of hymns, repetition of sacred words, salutations, and other items that may be appropriate. The items of offering are all symbolic.

Worship of Sri Ramakrishna describes the inner meaning of these offerings:

> The lotus of the heart should be offered as the seat of the Deity. The nectar that flows from the thousand-petalled lotus in the head should be offered for washing the feet. The mind should be offered as Arghya [offering of flower, leaf, sandalwood paste, etc.]. The above nectar should be offered for rinsing the mouth as well as for bathing. The principle of Akasa [ether] should be offered as clothing and that of smell as sandal paste. The heart should be offered as a flower, the life breaths [*pranas*] as incense, the principle of fire as light, the ocean of nectar as food offerings, the principle of sound as the bell and that of the air as the chowrie [a kind of fan], the actions of the sense organs and also the vagaries of the mind as dance. Flowers of various species should be offered to attain one's real state. The absence of deceit, egotism, desire, haughtiness, delusion, vanity, hatred, excitement, jealousy and avarice—these are called the ten flowers. There are five other flowers. Non-violence is the best flower; control of the senses is another; then there are the flowers of compassion, forgiveness and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

knowledge. One should worship with these fifteen flowers in the form of mental attitudes.[2]

Regarding mystic worship, Swami Brahmananda, the great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, says the following:

> Meditate upon God within the shrine of your heart, or visualize him present before you. Worship him mentally. Just as the ritualistic worshiper offers flowers, and waves incense and lights before the deity in the temple, so should you offer all the articles of worship mentally to the living presence enshrined within your heart....
>
> Meditation differs according to the individual temperament of the aspirant. As a general rule, the best way is to meditate in the shrine of the heart. Consider the body as the temple and see the Lord installed therein. However, when once the mind becomes steady through meditation, then the aspirant can think of God anywhere; either at his side, or behind him, or in his heart, or anywhere else. When the mind becomes absorbed, a shining light is first experienced in the mystic vision. With this vision, there comes a kind of higher and nobler joy, and the mind is reluctant to give up this joy and move onward. But if the aspirant goes further, the vision of the light will be concentrated into the form of the Chosen Ideal and the mind become merged in his consciousness....
>
> After meditation, sit quietly for at least half an hour; for during meditation itself the desired effect may not be produced, it may come later. The mind often grows calm while you are relaxing after meditation and then spiritual experiences come. For this reason an aspirant should not occupy himself with worldly thoughts or engage himself in secular affairs immediately after meditation. It may do him great harm.[3]

Mystic worship is essentially internal. Ceremonial worship with fruits, flowers, and other material ingredients is the external expression of mystic worship. It is said in the *Bhagavata* that Vyasa asked God's forgiveness for his three transgressions:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

O Lord, Thou art formless, but I have thought of Thee in my meditation as endowed with form; Thou art beyond speech, but I have sung hymns to Thee; Thou art the All-pervading Spirit, but I have made pilgrimages to sacred places. Be gracious, Lord, and forgive these three transgressions of mine.[4]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

26. Japa, *or Repetition of a Sacred Word*

The Meaning of *Japa*

Japa is the spiritual practice of repeating a sacred word referring to the Divine. Such a sacred word can be a verse, a short prayer, a phrase, or a mystic syllable. The purpose of the repetition is to bring the mind to a state of devotion and concentration. The practice of *japa* is as old as religion itself. Faith in the purifying and transforming power of such sacred words is a vital part of all religious traditions. These holy names can be called "key words." Every religion has such key words that inspire its followers: words charged with the power of holiness because many saints and prophets achieved God-consciousness by chanting or repeating them. When a seeker repeats such a word with faith and fervor, it releases the power of holiness, which fills his mind with devotion and then leads it to concentration, absorption, and illumination.

Japa is the most concentrated form of prayer. Earlier we quoted Sri Ramakrishna's saying: "The *sandhya* merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in *samadhi.*"[1] By the word *sandhya,* Sri Ramakrishna meant ceremonial worship and prayer, which are often elaborate. "Gayatri," which begins and ends with the sacred word Om, is the concentrated prayer of the Vedas that says: "Om. We meditate on the effulgence of that Supreme Divine Being, the creator of the world planes—earth, heaven, and interspaces. May that Divine Being direct our intelligence. Om." Om is the seed word of all prayer, in which concentrated prayer becomes most condensed. The repetition of Om merges in silence. *Japa*

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

gradually culminates in meditation. To help one maintain a constant remembrance of God, *japa* has many advantages over other methods. The practices of meditation and ceremonial worship require disciplined will, fixed posture, faith, and effort, but the practice of *japa* needs only effort.

Even when the repetition of a sacred word is merely mechanical, its healing, transforming, and purifying effect is certain. Since *japa* does not require any special posture, time, place, formality, or environment, it can be practiced under all circumstances. An exhortation attributed to Saint Kabir says: "Repeat the holy name of God in every breath, because you never know which will be your last breath."

Sacred Words in Religious Traditions

Every religious tradition recognizes the efficacy of some practice comparable to *japa* that it prescribes to its followers as part of their devotional exercises. The language and methodology may vary from one tradition to another, but the spirit remains the same. The Psalms of the Old Testament say: "Let them also that love thy name be joyful in Thee."[2] "Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name."[3] "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together."[4] "Make a joyful noise unto God, all the earth! Sing forth the glory of His name: Make His praise glorious."[5]

In Christianity, one of the most sacred words is *Jesus*. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Jesus Prayer—*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*—has been used since the days of the Desert Fathers in the early centuries of the Christian era. In Catholicism, the "Hail Mary" and the Lord's Prayer are chanted and repeated regularly.

In Judaism, one of the best-known prayer phrases is *Barukh Atah Adonai* (Blessed art Thou, O Lord). Other sacred phrases in Judaism are *Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Ehad* (Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One) and *Adonai, Adonai, El Rahum ve-Hannun* (Lord, Lord, Merciful and Compassionate).

Some of the sacred phrases repeated in Buddhism are *Namu-myo-ho-ren-Go-kyo* (Glory to the sutra of the lotus of Truth), *Namo Amida Butsu* (Salutation to the Buddha of Infinite Light), and *Om mani padme hum* (Om, jewel in the lotus of the heart).

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

In Islam, some of the sacred phrases used in prayer are *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate), *Allahu Akbar* (God is Great), and *Allah* (God). In Sufism, repeating the name of Allah or Ali is an important practice, often accompanied by breath control.

According to Hinduism, God is one but His forms are many. The Supreme Brahman, which is beyond all name and form, assumes different forms for the fulfillment of the spiritual aspirations of the different seekers. The *Bhagavad Gita* says: "Whatever may be the form a devotee seeks to worship with faith, in that form alone I make his faith unwavering."[6] So sacred words in the Hindu tradition are various. Some are indicators of the transcendental aspect of the Divine, and others refer to Its personal aspects. Important sacred words indicating the transcendental aspect include the Vedic word Om; the Gayatri mantra; the four *mahavakyas* or great Vedic sayings (see chapter 16): *Prajnanam Brahma* (Brahman is Consciousness); *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman); *Tat Tvam Asi* (That Thou art); *Ayam Atma Brahma* (This Atman is Brahman). Also, in meditation with some symbol, the following two formulas are repeated: *Om Sacchidanandam Brahma* (Brahman is Consciousness, Knowledge, and Bliss Absolute) and *Om Sacchidekam Brahma* (Brahman is Reality, Consciousness and One without a second).

Some other sacred phrases that are indicators of the personal aspects of the Divine are *Om Sri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram* (Salutation to Lord Ram, Victory to Lord Ram); *Namah Shivaya* (Salutation to Lord Shiva); and *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare* (Salutation to Lord Krishna, who draws us to Him). The seeker may choose any one of these sacred words or phrases for the practice of *japa*.

Japa in Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra

The traditions of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra consider *japa* to be the most effective way of invoking spiritual concentration of mind. The purifying power of *japa* cannot be overemphasized. *Japa* can be practiced either as part of mystic worship or as an independent spiritual discipline. The *Bhagavad Gita* extols *japa* as the highest form of mystic worship.[7] In the sacred texts of Tantra, *japa* is accorded an equal place to meditation. Vedanta prescribes different modes of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

worship for different seekers: first is worship of the Divine through symbols and images; higher than this is *japa;* higher than *japa* is meditation; and the highest is the realization "I am He." Maintaining an unwavering awareness (in thought, word, and action) that everything is Brahman, or God, is the highest form of worship. Those who are not able to dwell on that height are advised to meditate on Brahman or on some form of personal God. Those who find meditation difficult are advised to practice *japa,* and worship through symbols and rituals is suggested for those who are not able to concentrate on *japa.*

The sacred word, phrase, or mystic syllable used in *japa* is known by the Sanskrit word *mantra.* This word literally means "that which, when repeated with reflection upon its meaning, gives liberation and saves the seeker." The mantra is the sound equivalent of the Divine; the external image or symbol is the material form of the mantra. The sound vibration is the very first manifestation of the divine and nearest to it.

Tantra regards vibration and illumination as two parallel manifestations of the same cosmic energy, and teaches that both lead to realization of the Divine. It is the sound-vibration created by utterance of the mantra that enables the seeker to attain to the blessed state of God-realization. The mantra and the deity, the name and the named, are one and the same. According to Tantra, the mantras are not mere words coined and popularized by some persons, and not every word can be a mantra: Mantras are mystic words of concentrated thought endowed with great spiritual potency that were revealed to seers and saints in their hour of illumination. Often these mantras were seen in flashes of light or heard reverberating in space.

To the novice, the vibration created by the utterance of a mantra is merely a physical sound and the mantra itself nothing but a word. But to the adept, the mantra itself is the bestower of illumination. Illumination remains hidden in the mantra like an oak tree in an acorn. To the unillumined, a mantra and its *japa* may appear as meaningless jargon, just as to the uninformed, the formulas, equations, and notations used by the physicist, mathematician, or chemist may seem insignificant. The formula $E = mc^2$ would make no more sense to the ignorant than would a mantra such as Om or Hring to the uninitiated.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Tantra claims that mantras have power, that the deities invoked are responsive, and that illumination is real. A mantra that has its root in Sanskrit cannot be translated into any other language, for this would cause it to lose its power. Different mantras represent different aspects of the same Supreme Godhead. Some are indicators of the transcendental aspect of the Godhead and some of its personal aspects. Each mantra is thus a seed word or a code of a specific aspect of the Divine. As the personality of an individual is the expanded version of a particular genetic code, so in the same way, the spiritual realization that results from the repetition of a particular mantra is the manifested version of that mantra.

The mantra used by the seeker in the practice of *japa* is generally imparted by the spiritual teacher after it has been charged with spiritual power. The saving power of the mantra is not in the word itself but in the spiritual power transmitted to it. This transmission of spiritual power is known as *mantra-chaitanya*. It makes the mantra a potent force, alive with spiritual consciousness. The mode of mantra initiation varies depending upon the spiritual heredity and competence of the teacher, and also upon the fitness of the seeker. Mantra initiation is often given with the use of elaborate ceremonies and rituals. But these formalities become secondary where the teacher is competent and the mantra is an awakened one. When such a mantra is repeated by a seeker with faith and fervor, it releases a purifying power that is tangible and transforming. About mantra and *mantra-chaitanya,* Swami Vivekananda says:

> The Mantra-shastris [upholders of the mantra theory] believe that some words have been handed down through a succession of teachers and disciples, and the mere utterance of them will lead to some form of realisation. There are two different meanings of the word *Mantra-chaitanya.* According to some, if you practise the repetition of a certain mantra, you will see the Ishta-Devata who is the object or deity of that mantra. But according to others, the word means that if you practise the repetition of a certain mantra received from a guru not competent, you will have to perform certain ceremonials by which that mantra will become *chetana* or living, and then its repetition will be successful.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> Different mantras, when they are thus "living," show different signs, but the general sign is that one will be able to repeat it for a long time without feeling any strain and that his mind will very soon be concentrated.[8]

The Philosophy of *Japa*

The Ultimate Reality, according to the sacred texts of Vedanta, is all-pervading Pure Consciousness, designated by the word *Brahman*. Brahman has two aspects: transcendent and immanent. The universe of beings and things is the dynamic manifestation of Brahman. This manifestation begins with sound vibration, and Vedanta regards the sacred word Om as the first, or primordial, sound. Om stands for both the transcendent and the immanent aspects of Brahman. From Om are derived all possible sounds a human being can utter. As discussed in chapter 14, the Vedic seers described this primordial sound as Nada-Brahman, or Brahman in the form of sound. It is also known as *anahata-dhvani*, or the uninterrupted sound of the universe. Only the purified and concentrated mind can hear this subtle sound within.

The Pythagorean mystics of ancient Greece termed this sound the "music of the spheres." Sound is not merely what is audible. It has four aspects: gross, subtle, causal, and primordial. What we hear is the gross form of the sound. In its subtle form, sound is an impulse of electrical energy; in its causal form it is a thought-wave; and in its primordial form it is cosmic vibration, Nada-Brahman, or Om. Regarding Om, the *Katha Upanishad* says: "The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is Om. This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires."[9] Patanjali describes Om as Ishwara, or God, and states that constant repetition of Om removes all obstacles in the spiritual path and leads to Self-realization.[10] Om, thus, is the mother of all sounds, all words, and all mantras. All other sounds and mantras are only the diverse and differentiated expressions of Om, the Nada-Brahman. As the spiritual seeker utters a sacred word, he makes a sound. Following the trail of that sound, he finally arrives at the source of all sound. The sound of the mantra becomes the vehicle to reach Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The idea that God speaks the Word and thus causes the universe to appear is shared by all major religions except Jainism and Buddhism. The Bible says: "God said, Let there be light: and there was light."[11] This suggests that the Word preceded creation. The fourth Gospel begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[12] The ancient Greek philosophers designated the creative process as Logos (the Word). The Stoics identified Logos with their concept of God. To the ancient Jews, the world was created by "the Word of the Lord." The later Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria described this Word as the "Breath of God" and referred to it as Logos. The Vedas—the earliest of the world's religious texts—had long before declared: "In the beginning was Brahman, with whom was the Word, and the Word was truly the Supreme Brahman."[13] The uttered word, the thought process behind it, the thought by itself, the individual consciousness behind the thought, and the universal Consciousness behind the individual consciousness are all interconnected. In Vedanta, this idea is expressed in the doctrine of Sphota, which is the elaboration of the Vedic statement "All this is verily Brahman." According to Vedanta, the essence of everything is Brahman, the absolute Pure Consciousness. The diversities of the universe exist only in name and form. The Sphota is Nada-Brahman, the first manifestation of Brahman in time and space, in the form of sound vibration. Brahman first becomes conditioned as Sphota and then evolves into the more concrete, diverse universe. The Sphota is the material of all ideas and words, yet it is not itself any particular idea or word. If all the peculiarities that distinguish each word or idea from every other word or idea were removed, then what would remain is the Sphota. It is the Word behind all words, and it originates in Brahman. The sacred word Om stands for that Sphota. The doctrine of Sphota suggests that the sound of any particular word is a distant echo of the primordial sound, Nada-Brahman. The idea or thought denoted by a name always goes with that name. There is a correlation between the name and the form, the feeling and the object of feeling, the perception and the object perceived. When a name is uttered, there arises in the mind a modification that is the counterpart of the named object. As it is true with every name, so it is with a holy name. By repeating a sacred word, the mind takes the form of the divine

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

indicated by that word, and by continuous repetition the mind becomes one with the divine form and is rendered pure.

Japa and the Breath

The practice of *japa* is related to our breathing process. Vedanta maintains that creation is a process of manifestation and nonmanifestation, evolution and involution. The universe of name and form comes into being, endures for a length of time, and then dissolves back into its causal state. Manifestation of the universe into gross forms is what is known as evolution, and its return to the causal state of nonmanifestation is involution. Only through involution can evolution occur, and vice versa. This eternal process of involution and evolution has been described by the Upanishads as the inbreathing and outbreathing of Brahman. The breath of each living being is the very same cosmic breath that pulsates in the universe. Thus our breath is a reminder of our identity with Brahman, the Supreme Self, which is the Self of all beings. According to Vedanta, this is expressed by the Sanskrit mantra So'ham, or "I am He." As we inhale, we make the sound *so,* and as we exhale, *ham.* At the rate of fifteen times per minute, which is the average rate of breathing, each person is unconsciously repeating the So'ham 21,600 times daily.

The Psychology of *Japa*

It is a universal experience that words have power. Words influence our thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, and responses. The technique of arousing enthusiasm, courage, and concentration by the use of certain words is a common practice in political campaigns, military training, and advertising. It is the same technique that is used as a spiritual practice to invoke God-consciousness. Persistent and systematic repetition of a sacred word or phrase can awaken our latent spiritual urges, transform our character, and enable us to get established in spiritual consciousness. The process of thinking, Vedanta says, is a form of silent speaking. When we perceive a certain object through our senses, our mind unconsciously repeats the name of the object. *Japa* is the reverse process. When we repeat a sacred word consciously, that which is indicated by the word flashes in the mirror of our mind. Repetition of the word creates vibrations within us, and these vibrations continue to resonate in the layers of our con-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

sciousness even long after we have stopped uttering the word. This is known as molecular vibration. The first utterance of the word causes the initial vibration, and each subsequent repetition reinforces and integrates all the previous vibrations.

Japa helps the seeker to develop a taste for the sacred word that he utters. To relish the name of God is a sure sign of spiritual progress. This taste is much more than a passing sentiment or a temporary emotion. It is a state of God-consciousness that is deep and transforming. The mind develops a particular liking for those things on which it consciously dwells and about which it repeatedly thinks, hears, and speaks. The basic theory of audiovisual advertising is founded on this principle: by repeatedly bombarding us with the sounds and images of a particular object, the advertiser seeks to instill in our mind a desire for that object. The key element in such advertising is repetition.

Japa takes us nearer and nearer to God and finally brings us face to face with Him. Psychologically speaking, as we repeat the name of an object, we move closer and closer to that object. With the first repetition, an impression of the object is created in the mind. When the impression is made to recur, the mind develops an unconscious liking for the object. In time, with continued repetition, this liking grows into attachment. As the attachment deepens, there arises a strong desire to possess the object. Following the same process, repetition of a holy name eventually leads us to God, the source of all holiness.

Japa is an effective means of achieving purification of mind. Thoughts that are contrary to our spiritual goal and distracting to our mind are not just passing ideas. They have their deep roots, known in the Yoga and Vedanta systems as *samskaras*. The *samskaras* are the deposits of the countless repetitions of thoughts, words, and actions that have formed into subconscious habits. Such seeds of thought cannot be repressed or rationalized away. They are to be sublimated or transcended. Repetition of a holy name or sacred word, done methodically and uninterruptedly over a long period with devotion, creates a strong counter-*samskara* of holiness, which first neutralizes the *samskaras* of worldliness and then overcomes them.

The sacred texts of Vedanta prescribe *japa* to control speech, which is the first step toward concentration and meditation. Such control is not just outward silence, for even when a person is outwardly

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

silent, there continues a monologue within. Repetition of the sacred word keeps the mind occupied with one thought and paves the way for the practice of internal silence. *Japa* is the supporting practice of meditation. The state of meditation cannot be reached all of a sudden. To attain that state requires invoking the mood, ingathering the mind, and concentrating without interruption, and all these are achieved through *japa*. Meditation is an extension of *japa*. *Japa* is meditation with breaks, while meditation is *japa* without breaks. Absorption in *japa* leads to absorption in meditation.

Methods of *Japa*

Methods of performing *japa* are many, and they vary from tradition to tradition. The methods generally considered to be orthodox are the following: (1) *vachika-japa*, (2) *upamsu-japa*, (3) *manasa-japa*, (4) *likhita-japa*, (5) *akhanda-japa*, (6) *ajapa-japa*, (7) *japa* at six centers of consciousness, and (8) *purascharana*.

Vachika-japa

By this method, the seeker repeats the sacred word audibly.

Upamsu-japa

This is the method of repeating the sacred word semiaudibly by moving only the tongue and lips.

Manasa-japa

In this method the sacred word is repeated mentally without allowing the tongue and lips to move. According to the *Manu Samhita*, *vachika-japa* is considered ten times superior to ceremonial worship, *upamsu-japa* is ten times superior to *vachika-japa*, and *manasa-japa* is ten times superior to *upamsu-japa*. Though considered best, *manasa-japa* is not recommended for those who lack the necessary concentration and alertness of mind. For them, the first two varieties are regarded as beneficial.

Likhita-japa

Following this method, the seeker, instead of repeating the sacred word verbally or mentally, writes the word continuously or for a fixed number of times.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Akhanda-japa

This is the method of repeating a sacred word a specific number of times without a break, or for a fixed period of time, such as from sunrise to sunset. *Akhanda-japa* is often performed rhythmically and congregationally.

Ajapa-japa

In this method, *japa* is performed by repeating the sacred word mentally at all times and with every breath.

Japa *at Six Centers of Consciousness*

The seeker performs *japa* at the six centers of consciousness, or lotuses: at the organ of evacuation, near the organ of generation, in the region of the navel, in the heart, in the throat, and between the eyebrows. The seeker begins his *japa* by concentrating on the lowest center and gradually begins to move upward from center to center, finally rising above the six centers to reach the crown of the head, where the individual consciousness comes in contact with the Universal Consciousness. He comes down following the reverse order and then repeats the process again.

Purascharana

This is the ritualistic way of performing *japa* as part of a spiritual vow. In this vow the seeker performs *japa* a certain number of times every day, methodically increasing or decreasing the number of repetitions. He may begin on the first day after the new moon by repeating the sacred word 1,000 times. The next day he repeats the word 2,000 times and the next day 3,000 times, thus increasing the number until the day of the full moon, when he reaches 15,000. From the day after the full moon he begins to reduce the number by 1,000 each day, finally coming down to 1,000 at the next new moon. The seeker may continue such practice over a period of one, two, or three years, as his spiritual teacher directs. As part of *purascharana* the seeker is required to perform certain special religious duties such as almsgiving. Additional practice of *japa* is considered a substitute for such duties.

According to the *Yoginihridaya Tantra,* places appropriate for the practice of *purascharana* are a riverbank, a mountain cave, the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

confluence of a river and the ocean, the ground beneath a *vilwa, ashvattha,* or *amalaki* tree, or near a *tulasi* plant, a forest, a temple, a holy shrine, or one's own home. The seeker who takes a vow to practice *japa* for a certain period should use only *kusha* grass as his bed, must not indulge in the enjoyment of music, must not bathe in warm water, and must not worship any deity other than his Chosen Ideal.

There are six major views of Tantra regarding the requirements for the practice of *purascharana.* According to the *Kularnava Tantra,* this form consists of performing *japa,* along with ceremonial worship and fire sacrifice, three times daily, at dawn, midday, and evening, for a certain number of days. The number of repetitions is to be gradually increased each day. The *Mundamala Tantra* gives a second view, according to which *purascharana* is a vow to perform *japa* continuously for a fixed period of time, keeping the number of repetitions the same each day. A third view says that *purascharana* is a vow to perform *japa* during the periods of solar or lunar eclipses: *japa* should start when the eclipse begins and continue until it ends. The seeker is required to fast and repeat the sacred word either standing waist-deep in a river that flows into the ocean or sitting in a sacred spot after bathing in some holy water. A fourth view describes *purascharana* as a vow to repeat the sacred word continuously from sunrise to sunset for a specific number of days, or to perform *japa* 1,000 times daily from the eighth day of one dark fortnight to the eighth day of the next. *Sharadatilaka,* another text of Tantra, gives us the fifth view that *purascharana* is a vow to repeat the sacred word 1,200,000 times. According to a sixth view, the nature of the seeker's sacred word determines the number of repetitions in the practice of *purascharana.* For example, there is one particular sacred word, representing the Divine Mother Bhuvaneshwari, which requires 3,200,000 repetitions and 320,000 fire sacrifices. That is to say, if the seeker repeats the sacred word 10,000 times and performs fire sacrifice 1,000 times daily, for 320 days, then his *purascharana* becomes complete. The essence of all the views regarding the practice of *purascharana* is that the sacred word should be repeated a great number of times without a break, with concentration and devotion.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The Practice of Japa

Japa does not require any special preparations or formal observances. It can be practiced under all conditions, anywhere, and at any time. Yet this does not mean that *japa* is just mechanical repetition of a sacred word without thought or feeling. Success in *japa* depends neither upon the method of practice nor upon the number of repetitions, but upon repeating the sacred word with whole-souled devotion. Devotion becomes whole-souled when our speech, mind, and soul all join in the repetition. Devotion brings spontaneous concentration, which culminates in absorption. *Japa* gradually merges in meditation. But devotion, in order to grow, must be rooted in the mind, and for the development of roots, orthodox observances and habits, as enjoined by the sacred texts, are vital in the beginning. Such observances and habits are needed for two reasons: they help invoke the spiritual mood, and they give the practice depth. Without the spiritual mood, *japa* becomes dry and mechanical; and without depth, it becomes casual and superficial. Emphasizing the necessity of ceremonial observances, Sri Ramakrishna says:

> When, hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya [ceremonial practice of *japa* and meditation] any more. Then only will you have the right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rama or Hari, or even simply Om.[14]

Guidelines for *Japa*

Regarding special observances in the practice of *japa*, the sacred texts of Vedanta, Tantra, and Yoga give us specific guidelines. These are with regard to: (1) environment, (2) posture, (3) place, (4) keeping a fixed time, (5) way of articulation, (6) keeping count of the number of repetitions, (7) seat, (8) pace of repetition, (9) alertness of mind, (10) reflection on the meaning, (11) loyalty to the sacred word, (12) adherence to a fixed center of consciousness, and (13) geographical direction to face.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Environment

Japa is to be practiced secretly and in solitude. A sacred text says: "Gifts given without being made public, knowledge acquired without vanity, and *japa* done in secrecy, will be infinitely potent in their results."[15] The sacred word that the seeker receives from the teacher at the time of his initiation is very personal to him. He must not speak of it to anybody except his teacher. The purpose of keeping it secret is not for any occult or mystical reason but in order to let it sink deeper and deeper into the seeker's consciousness. It is secret because it is most sacred.

One is advised not to practice *japa* or meditation in moonlight. It is said that moonlight evokes a worldly mood in the mind. The places recommended for spiritual practices are an open field, a mountaintop, the bank of a river, or a cave. The seashore is not favorable because of the high wind from the ocean. Also, places without the least breeze are not favorable for spiritual practices. Further, different places are favorable for *japa* and meditation at different times, but not all the time. Some places may be favorable for chanting and singing, while other places are favorable for *japa* and meditation.

Posture

Seated posture with straight back and crossed legs is considered favorable for the practice of *japa.* Following are testimonials of the sacred texts in regard to posture. According to the *Prapanchasara:*

> One should have a light stomach and should have had sound sleep before sitting for *japa* and meditation, on a proper seat, in a clean spot, with eyes closed and facing east. Let him sit straight with the palms of his hands placed in the lap, right over left, well-stretched, with his mind and senses alert and calm, and think that he is a harmonious and undistracted agent performing the act of *japa* and meditation. The aspirant must not be nodding his head or exposing his teeth, and must repeat the sacred word distinctly and clearly.[16]

Bharadvaja says that "*japa* is adversely affected by spitting, yawning, getting angry, feeling sleepy or hungry, as well as by inad-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

vertence and seeing low and sinful people."[17] Brihaspati maintains that "while doing *japa* one should not be pacing about, laughing, looking at someone, leaning on a wall, talking, having the head covered, placing one foot or hand over the other, allowing the mind to wander, or uttering the sacred word aloud so that others may hear."[18] The *Smritichandrika* says, "*Japa* and other religious practices done while running, standing, or doing some other activity are fruitless."[19]

Japa can be practiced with eyes closed, half-closed, or open. With eyes closed or half-closed, the seeker keeps his mind focused on the form or symbol of his Ishta within his heart as he repeats his sacred word. Following this method, the seeker may choose to mentally offer a flower to his Ishta each time he repeats the sacred word. With eyes open, the seeker is advised to fix his gaze on the form of his Chosen Ideal, outside and in front of him, while he repeats his sacred word. He should think that his Ishta is seated before him, looking toward him, pleased to hear his repetition and anxious to shower His grace on him.

Distractions in *japa* are quite common in the beginning. They are due to the resistance of the mind, which is by nature restless and outgoing. As a way of overcoming distractions, Sri Ramakrishna advises the seeker to think that his mind is tied to the feet of his chosen form of the Divine with a silken thread and thus to repeat his sacred word.

Place

Japa can be practiced at any place. Yet, there are places that are considered especially beneficial for the practice because of their holy associations and vibrations. These are temples or holy shrines, places of sacred memory, or any other places where *japa* has been performed by many seekers of God over a long period. Also considered auspicious are holy pilgrimage sites, and spots associated with the life of the seeker's Ishta. It is said that the presiding deity of the sacred place, being pleased by the seeker's earnest practice of *japa,* destroys the impurities of his mind. About such places, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Know for certain, my children, that there is God's manifestation where people have practiced for a long time austerity, *japa,* meditation, steady abstraction of mind, prayer and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

worship in order to have His vision. The thoughts of God have become solidified there, so to speak, on account of their devotion; that is why holy thoughts and visions are so easily attained there."[20] The places which are considered unfavorable for *japa* are those where people are averse to thinking of God, where holy men are not honored, where charity and austerities are not practiced, and which are inhabited by ferocious animals.

Keeping a Fixed Time

According to the sacred texts, *japa* needs to be performed regularly, at fixed hours. By so doing, one develops a strong modification of mind for doing *japa* at those hours. Regularity helps develop a rhythm in our body and mind. If we take our meals at fixed times every day, our body will feel the need for food at those times. If we go to sleep daily at a fixed time, our body will feel the need for sleep at that time. So it is with the practice of *japa*. Being habituated to perform *japa* at certain hours, our mind will feel the need and inclination to repeat the sacred word at those times. Scrupulous adherence to maintaining fixed hours strengthens our willpower and hastens our spiritual progress.

The most auspicious hours for the practice of *japa* are the four quarters of the day: the hour preceding daybreak, midday, the junction of the day and night, and midnight. The sacred texts maintain that at those times nature becomes tranquil. Our body and mind, being part of nature, are influenced by that tranquillity and thus are in a favorable state for spiritual practices. Also, according to the sacred texts, a spiritual current flows through nature at those times, which helps to concentrate the mind.

There are also certain special days regarded as auspicious for the practice of *japa:* the full-moon day, the new-moon day, the eighth and eleventh days of both dark and bright fortnights, and the days of the special annual worships of the various divine manifestations.

Regarding regularity and fixed time for the practice of *japa*, Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother says: "It is very necessary to have a fixed time for these things. For it cannot be said when the auspicious moment will come. It arrives so suddenly. No one gets any hint of it beforehand."[21]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Way of Articulation

The sacred texts maintain that in *japa* the sacred word must be correctly articulated. That is to say, all three aspects of our being—body, mind, and soul—should join harmoniously in the utterance. It is a common experience that while the lips utter, the mind does not join in. Even when the mind and lips utter together, the soul does not take part. But when all three unite, the sacred word is found to rise up from the deepest layers of our being. At that stage, the vibration of the sacred word is felt in all the levels of our consciousness, and *japa* becomes the most absorbing and enlightening spiritual practice.

Correctness of articulation is reached by three stages. At the first stage, the utterance is physical. The sacred word is chanted by the tongue, lips, and throat. At the second stage, the sacred word is repeated primarily by the mind, with the tongue, lips, and throat serving a secondary role. At the third stage, the soul joins the body and mind, assuming the primary role, and the body and mind vibrate in harmony with the soul.

Each mantra, or sacred word, has a distinct structure of sound and meter, and when repeated correctly, it rouses in the seeker a particular set of vibrations, revealing that aspect of the Godhead indicated by the sacred word. If it is repeated improperly or incorrectly, the desired result does not follow and the spiritual progress of the seeker is impeded. Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi says: "The mantra must be correctly repeated. An incorrect utterance delays progress. A woman had for a part of her mantra the word *Rukmini-nathaya.* But she would repeat it as *Ruku*. This impeded her progress. But she got the correct mantra afterwards through His grace."[22]

Keeping Count of the Number of Repetitions

Generally speaking, a seeker is advised by the teacher to perform *japa* by repeating the sacred word for a specific number of times. Counting is done in three ways: on the fingers, with a rosary, and in the mind. The purpose of a rosary is to keep count as a support for concentration. Rosaries may be made from *rudraksha* seeds, *bhadrakshya* seeds, beads made from the *tulasi* plant, the *bel* tree, or the sandalwood tree, lotus seeds, crystal beads, or

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

coral beads. Some sects have even used the dry bones of different animals or humans for the making of beads. The nature of the sacred word determines the type of beads to be used by the seeker. The rosary consists of either 108 or 54 beads. The rosary used by a seeker for repeating a particular sacred word should be restricted to that word and used by him alone. It should not be worn as an article of clothing and should never be discarded or changed.

Regarding the number of repetitions, Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, says:

> A mantra becomes conscious (awakened) when you repeat it one hundred thousand times. The utterance of the mantra in a proper spirit even once purifies the mind. Instantly the mind becomes delighted and blissful.... Repeat it one hundred thousand times or even ten thousand times according to your capacity. Even five thousand times is good if the mantra is a big one, or even two thousand times if the mantra is too big a one.[23]

During the time of *japa*, the rosary is held in the right hand and by the middle finger. About the position of the hand, Swami Saradananda advises: "It is better to make *japa* by keeping the rosary down by the chest. Some say that the rosary should not be lowered down to the navel. If that is inconvenient for you, you may spread the edge of your wrapper [meditation shawl] or some other thing over your hand and then do it."[24]

Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi observes:

> Repeating the name of God a fixed number of times, telling the rosary or counting on fingers, is calculated to direct the mind to God. The natural tendency of the mind is to run this way and that way. Through these means it is attracted to God. While repeating the name of God, if one sees His form and becomes absorbed in Him, one's *japa* stops. One gets everything when one succeeds in meditation.[25]

> Repeat the Name of God, whether your mind is concentrated or not. It will be good for you if you can repeat the Name of God for a fixed number of times daily.[26]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The rosary serves three purposes: it is a tool for counting the number of repetitions; it is a support for concentration on the mantra; and it strengthens the practice of *japa* by making it more absorbing and revealing in its meaning. Following the trail of verbal or mental repetition, the seeker's mind rises to the subtler and deeper planes of self-awareness. The third contribution is not perceived in the beginning. But in the course of time the whole psychophysical system vibrates in the rhythm of the repetition. The rosary appears as a living entity, the sacred word as a living presence of the Divine. For the seeker, the *japa* mantra appears as the Purusha dwelling within the body, the city of eleven gates: the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, the mouth, the navel, the two lower organs, and the aperture at the top of the head through which the life-breath of a *yogi* goes out at the time of death. The whole universe appears as a rosary: the sun, moon, stars, forests, desert, sky, mountains—each represents a unit in it. With progress in *japa,* the mantra begins to change its form and meaning. So also the rosary changes its meaning and significance. Hitherto material and inert, it now begins to reveal its spiritual dimensions.

According to the *Kularnava Tantra, japa* is that which destroys the sins of thousands of births and reveals the Supreme Self within. According to the *Haribhaktivilasa:* "None should recite the mantra without keeping count."[27] Keeping count has its prescribed rules: 108 repetitions are considered one round or unit.

Regarding the meaning and significance of the number 108, there are a number of views. According to the *Varaha Upanishad,* the height of every individual is 96 finger-widths placed horizontally, as measured by his own fingers.[28] Again, according to the *Mahanarayana Upanishad,* "The heart, which is located just at the distance of a finger span below the Adam's apple and [12 fingers] above the navel, is the great abode of the universe [because Paramatman, the Soul of all, resides there]."[29] Thus 96 + 12 = 108, and so 108 is the number which signifies the union of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul.

According to another view, the height of an individual is 96 fingers and the Supreme Soul in the Sun has been described as having 12 petals.[30] So 96 + 12 = 108, signifying the union of *jivatman* (the individual soul) and Paramatman (the Supreme Soul). By

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

repeating *japa* with concentration and earnestness, the seeker gradually rises above body awareness and becomes one with the Supreme Self.

The *Akshamalika Upanishad* regards each letter of the Sanskrit alphabet as one unit of the rosary. Saint Ramprasad sang that the Divine Mother Kali reveals Herself in the letters of the alphabet, which are 50 in number. Counting the letters of the alphabet from beginning to end and then from end to beginning makes 50 + 50. Add to this sum 5, for the five primordial elements of creation (earth, water, air, fire, and ether), and 3, for the three *gunas (sattva, rajas,* and *tamas)*, the modifications of matter. This makes 108 (50 + 50 + 5 + 3). The number 108 represents manifested Brahman. The *meru,* the extra unit in the rosary, is the indicator of Nirguna Brahman. According to another view, the seeker is advised not to cross over the *meru.*

In the book *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization,* by Georg Feuerstein, Subhash Kak, and David Frawley, the authors write about the significance of the number 108:

> The decipherment of the Rig-Vedic code has shown that, remarkably, the Vedic poet-mathematicians had discovered the astronomical significance of the...number 108, which is half the number of hymn groups [216], [and] is roughly the average distance between the Sun and Moon in terms of solar diameters. It is also the average distance between the Moon and Earth in terms of lunar diameters. These values can be obtained by simple measurements with the naked eye. For example, if a pole of a certain height were to be separated from the observer by a distance that is 108 times this height, its angular size would be exactly equal to that of the Sun or the Moon.... The above discovery also would seem to explain why 108 beads are used in Hindu rosaries. A full round on the rosary represents a symbolic journey from the earth to the sky.[31]

Swami Vijnanananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, gives us a meaningful and practical explanation of the number 108. A person while in the mother's womb as a baby remembers all the painful experiences of the past. He thinks how all

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

his lives had been in vain in not realizing God. Now he resolves that in this birth he will chant the name of the Lord with every breath. A normal, healthy person breathes 21,600 times in twenty-four hours (assuming fifteen heartbeats per minute). But as soon as he is born, he is deluded by the world-appearance of the Lord. He remembers only 216 instead of 21,600. He therefore repeats the name of God only 108 times in the morning and 108 times in the evening.

Yet another view declares that spiritual merit acquired through *japa* must be shared with all beings. So it is said that the result of 100 repetitions belongs to the seeker, and 8 are given for the well-being of all.

Seat

Traditionally, *japa* is practiced in a seated posture on a prayer seat or rug. The *Bhagavad Gita* prescribes the preferred materials for the seat: "In a clean spot having fixed his seat—a firm seat, neither too high nor too low—and having spread over it kusha-grass, and then a deer skin, and then a cloth, and sitting there, he should practice yoga for the purification of the self, restraining the activities of his mind and senses, and bringing his thoughts to a point."[32] According to sacred traditions, the preferred material for the seat is wool or cotton. The *Kalika Purana* says that one should never use seats made of iron, brass, or lead. The *Gandharva Tantra* states that the seat should not be too low, too high, or broken. According to the *Kamadhenu Tantra*, all *japa* and worship become fruitless to a seeker who spreads a seat in a place of pilgrimage and performs *japa* sitting on that seat. The rug or prayer seat that is used for daily practice of *japa* and meditation absorbs the holy vibrations and is therefore to be preserved. The seeker's seat is very personal and sacred to him, and should not be used by anyone else.

Pace of Repetition

Japa should be performed with an even tempo. The repetition should be neither too slow nor too fast. Furthermore, the repetition should be in keeping with the rhythm of the seeker's personality. Every seeker has his own rhythm, determined by his heartbeat, breathing, pace of walking, and manner of speaking. In his repetition he must abide by this rhythm.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Alertness of Mind

Repetition of the sacred word should be done consciously. The seeker must know and feel that he is repeating the sacred word. Unconscious repetition is mechanical and has little effect over the mind. Lacking in mental alertness, the seeker slips into a state of inertia, an obstacle in concentration described by the sacred texts as *laya*, which is a mild form of sleep. Conscious repetition, with alertness of mind, overcomes this obstacle. In the words of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother:

> Repeating the Name of God once, with the mind controlled, is equivalent to a million repetitions with the mind away from God. You may repeat the Name for the whole day, but if the mind is elsewhere, that does not produce much result. The repetition must be accompanied by concentration. Then alone one gets the grace of God.[33]

Reflection on the Meaning

The traditional view is that the sacred word is to be repeated with meditation on its meaning. Patanjali stresses this point and says, "The repetition of this (Om) and meditating on its meaning [is the way]."[34] Here the meaning is not the etymological meaning of the word, but the thought signified by it. Speaking about *japa* of the sacred word Om, the *Chhandogya Upanishad* says that it may be contended "that he who knows this [true meaning of the syllable Om] and he who does not, perform the same sacrifice [and therefore must reap the same fruit]. But [this is not so. The results of] knowledge and ignorance are different. Work that is done with knowledge, faith, and the Upanishad [i.e., meditation on the deities] produces the more powerful fruit."[35] The *Mahanirvana Tantra* says, "If the worshipper does not realize the meaning and the virtues of the formula [sacred word] he utters, it would be absolutely futile for him, were he to chant it ten million times."[36] Yaska in his *Nirukta* says: "He who repeats a Vedic Mantra without understanding its meaning is like an ass carrying a load of sandalwood; it knows only the weight of the load but does not enjoy the fragrance."[37] Another text maintains that repetition of the sacred word without first awakening it, and without devotion, produces no result, even if the word is repeated a hundred

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

thousand times. The view of these sacred texts is that *japa* becomes spiritually effective when performed with a combination of devotion, faith, and understanding.

According to Tantra, the Ultimate Reality has two aspects: the Absolute and the relative. The Absolute is designated as Shiva, the ever-tranquil, auspicious, and nondual Reality, while the relative is designated as Shakti, the dynamic manifestation of the Ultimate. Success comes only with the union of Shiva and Shakti. Shakti is looked upon as the form of *japa* and Shiva as that of meditation. So Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi says, "One should meditate on one's chosen deity as one goes on making *japa*."[38]

There is, however, another view, which strongly holds that if the seeker is sincere in devotion, the effect of *japa* is infallible, even if performed mechanically or without proper pronunciation, faith, or knowledge of the meaning of the sacred word. According to this view, the sacred word, if repeated for some time, is capable of creating devotion even in a stony heart. Through the power of *japa*, faith in the sacred word and the knowledge of its meaning are bound to come.

Loyalty to the Sacred Word

The seeker is asked to be one-pointed and absolutely loyal to the sacred word he receives from his teacher. He must never change or alter it, or pass it to another person. This loyalty brings about attachment to the sacred word, which leads to devotion, concentration, and the experience of the spiritual mood during the practice of *japa*. Devotion and concentration grow only when the seeker's worship, *japa*, and meditation are all directed to the specific aspect of the Godhead, selected for him as his Chosen Ideal by the teacher. While practicing *japa* and meditation, his concentration and devotion should flow only toward one—that is, to his own Chosen Ideal. Other aspects of the Godhead are to be looked upon and adored as the different facets of his own Ideal.

Adherence to a Fixed Center of Consciousness

As in meditation, the seeker practicing *japa* is advised to hold the mind at a fixed center of consciousness. The three centers generally chosen for spiritual practices are the heart center, the center between

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the eyebrows, and the crown of the head. The center of consciousness at which the seeker practices daily concentration and *japa* must remain unchanged. Any change can disturb the development of concentration.

Geographical Direction to Face

In repeating *japa* or practicing meditation, the seeker is instructed to sit facing east or north. The sun, representing knowledge, rises in the east. Facing east reminds us about the light of knowledge. The needle of a compass reminds us of the northern direction. The symbolic significance of the compass is that in the midst of all our daily duties, our mind, like a compass pointing to the north, must be one-pointed toward God.

Regarding the observance of formalities and compliance of rules about time, place, and so forth, Sri Ramakrishna says, "How long must a man continue formal worship? As long as he has not developed love for God's Lotus Feet, as long as he does not shed tears and his hair does not stand on end when he repeats God's name. When the fruit grows, the flower drops off. When one has developed love of God and has beheld Him, then one gives up rites."[39] Love of God for a beginner is formal and his practice of *japa* and meditation are ceremonial. Sri Ramakrishna describes such practice as *vaidhi-bhakti* (ritualistic devotion) and says, "*Vaidhi-bhakti* is like moving a fan to make a breeze. One needs the fan to make the breeze. Similarly, one practices *japa,* austerity, and fasting, in order to acquire love of God. But the fan is set aside when the southern breeze blows of itself. Such action as *japa* and austerity drop away when one spontaneously feels love of God. Who, indeed, will perform the ceremonies enjoined in the scriptures, when mad with love of God? Devotion to God may be said to be 'green' so long as it doesn't grow into love of God; but it becomes 'ripe' when it has grown into such love."[40]

Success in Japa

Success in *japa* has been termed by some sacred texts as *mantra-siddhi.* The following are some of the signs of *mantra-siddhi:* the mantra, when repeated by the seeker, may appear before his mind's eye in letters of fire; he may experience that the mantra is being con-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

stantly repeated within himself, even when he is not uttering it; as he repeats the sacred word, he may feel he is being filled with purity and holiness; he may experience the rising of his spiritual consciousness *(kundalini)*; he may feel the living presence of his Ishta, or Chosen Ideal, in the sacred word; being filled with spiritual emotion, he may shed tears or tremble, or his hair may stand on end. According to the path of devotion, a seeker is to be considered a *siddha* (adept) in *japa* only when he has acquired ecstatic love for his Chosen Ideal and when in his presence others feel inspired to repeat the name of the Lord spontaneously.

According to Tantra, *japa* alone has the power to bring about spiritual fulfillment. It does not matter whether the seeker practices meditation with *japa* or not. *Japa* itself is the surest way of subduing the restless mind. The sacred word, when repeated with faith and devotion, instantly purifies the body and mind. The sacred texts unanimously maintain that no spirituality is possible without *brahmacharya,* or continence, and only an adept in the practice of *japa* can attain success in this respect. *Japa* is the most effective way of overcoming lustfulness. According to the *Bhakti Ratnavali,* an anthology from the *Bhagavata:* "For those who seek salvation, there is nothing so effective in uprooting the sinful tendencies of the heart as the chanting of the names of the supremely holy Lord."[41] Once a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna asked the Master how he could overcome lust. The Master instructed him to simply repeat a specific name of the Lord. The advice was simple, but the remedy proved decisive.

Japa brings the awakening of *kundalini,* or inner consciousness. In answer to the question on how the *kundalini* is to be awakened, Swami Brahmananda says: "According to some, there are special exercises by which the *kundalini* can be awakened, but I believe it can best be awakened by the practice of *japa* and meditation. The practice of *japa* is specially suited to this present age.... It is sufficient if you will repeat the name of the Lord. Through the practice of *japa* and meditation you will reach the stage of *kumbhaka* [suspension of breath] without risking the dangers which may easily come from the practice of breathing exercises."[42]

Japa annuls even the inexorable law of karma. According to this law, one has to experience the effects of one's actions. No one

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

can escape karma, but *japa* minimizes the severity of the consequences. As Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi says, "One has to suffer the consequences of one's deeds. But by repeating the name of God, you can lessen the intensity. If you were destined to have a wound as wide as a ploughshare, you will get a pin-prick at least. The effect of karma can be counteracted to a great extent by *japa* and austerities."[43]

Violations in the Practice of *Japa*

According to the *Haribhakti Vilasa*, the practice of *japa* becomes flawed and does not bear fruit if the seeker commits any of the following ten violations:[44] (1) looking upon the Chosen Ideal as different from His name and form, (2) regarding the glory of the sacred word as described by the sacred scriptures as mere praise, (3) speaking disrespectfully of the sacred texts, (4) disobeying the spiritual teacher, (5) disparaging the devotees of the Lord, (6) considering the sacred word as no more than an arrangement of letters, (7) imparting the sacred word to unworthy persons, (8) doubting the efficacy of *japa*, (9) regarding *japa* as equal to other spiritual practices, and (10) repeatedly committing sinful acts while being strengthened by the power of *japa*. According to the *Padma Purana*, these violations in *japa* are to be rectified by *japa* alone.

The Sacred Texts and the Great Teachers on *Japa*

The sacred texts as well as the great teachers of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra greatly extol *japa* and its purifying and transforming power.

> A spiritual man attains his goal through *japa* alone, whatever else he may or may not perform.
>
> —MANU[45]

> That which does away with the sins committed in one's whole lifetime is *japa*. *Japa* is said to be the foremost of all dharmas.
>
> —*MAHABHARATA*[46]

> Of words I am the monosyllable Om. Of sacrifices I am the sacrifice of *japa*.
>
> —*BHAGAVAD GITA*[47]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

A spiritual aspirant intent on *japa* will get the result of all sacrifices.

—*TANTRASARA*[48]

By the repetition of the mantra comes the realization of the Chosen Deity.

—PATANJALI[49]

The names of the Lord, be they uttered with or without the knowledge of their power and holiness, destroy the sins of man, as fire consumes fuel. A potent drug, even when used casually without any awareness of its powers, manifests its inherent curative quality; even so does the utterance of a mantra (the Lord's Name).

—*SHRIMAD BHAGAVATAM*[50]

Once you take that name all your sin vanishes. You repeat it a second time and Sri Krishna is yours.

—SRI CHAITANYA[51]

I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss, as I repeat my Mother Kali's name; it so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk! First my guru gives molasses for the making of the Wine; my longing is the ferment to transform it. Knowledge, the maker of the Wine, prepares it for me then; and when it is done, my mind imbibes it from the bottle of the mantra, taking the Mother's name to make it pure. Drink of this Wine, says Ramprasad, and the four fruits of life are yours.

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA[52]

Repeat His name, and sins will disappear. Thus you will destroy lust, anger, the desire for creature comforts, and so on.

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA[53]

A typhoid patient has very little chance of recovery if he loses all taste for food; but his life need not be despaired of if he enjoys food even a little. That is why one should cultivate a taste for God's name. Any name will do—Durga, Krishna, or Siva. Then if, through the chanting of the name,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

one's attachment to God grows day by day, and joy fills the soul, one has nothing to fear. The delirium will certainly disappear; the grace of God will certainly descend.

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA[54]

There is great power in the seed of God's name. It destroys ignorance. A seed is tender, and the sprout soft; still it pierces the hard ground. The ground breaks and makes way for the sprout.

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA[55]

If meditation is not possible, do *japa*. Realization will come through *japa*.

—HOLY MOTHER, SRI SARADA DEVI[56]

Whether you jump into water or get pushed into it your cloth will get drenched. [That is, the effect of *japa* is infallible whether practiced with devotion or not.]

—HOLY MOTHER, SRI SARADA DEVI[57]

The mantra purifies the body. A man becomes pure by repeating the mantra of God.

—HOLY MOTHER, SRI SARADA DEVI[58]

As wind removes a cloud, so does the name of God disperse the cloud of worldliness.

—HOLY MOTHER, SRI SARADA DEVI[59]

[The mind will be steadied of itself] if one repeats the name fifteen or twenty thousand times each day. I have seen it actually happen. Let him do that first and talk afterwards if it fails.

—HOLY MOTHER, SRI SARADA DEVI[60]

Do you know the significance of *japa* and other spiritual practices? By these, the power of the sense-organs is subdued.

—HOLY MOTHER, SRI SARADA DEVI[61]

Repeat the name of God in the innermost core of your heart, and in all sincerity take refuge in the Master. Do not bother to know how your mind is reacting to things around. And do not waste time in calculating and worry-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

ing whether or not you are progressing in the path of spirituality.

—HOLY MOTHER, SRI SARADA DEVI[62]

The easiest and best way of solving the problems of life is to take the name of God, of Sri Ramakrishna, in silence.

—HOLY MOTHER, SRI SARADA DEVI[63]

Japa is repeating the holy name; through this the devotee rises to the infinite.

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA[64]

There are certain sacred words, called mantras, which have power, when repeated under proper conditions, to produce these extraordinary powers.

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA[65]

The guru passes the thought power, the mantra, that he has received from those before him; and nothing can be done without a guru. In fact, great danger ensues. Usually without a guru, these Yoga practices lead to lust; but with one, this seldom happens. Each Ishta has a mantra. The Ishta is the ideal peculiar to the particular worshipper; the mantra is the external word to express it. Constant repetition of the word helps to fix the ideal firmly in the mind.

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA[66]

The chanting of the name of the Lord purifies both the body and the mind. Have intense faith in the power of God's name and meditate on Him. If you chant His name, all your bonds will be broken, and you will become fearless. You will find immortality.

—SWAMI BRAHMANANDA[67]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

27. Pranayama, *or* *Control of Breath*

The Meaning and Significance of *Pranayama*

Pranayama is one of the proven ways of calming the restless mind and invoking the right mood for concentration, which is so necessary for the practice of meditation. In a general way, *pranayama* is associated with the control and regulation of the breathing process: Through this means, the seeker endeavors to mobilize and stabilize the vital force within.

There is an inherent connection between breath and life: life is breath and breath is life. A kind of breathing begins within the mother's womb and continues after a child is born without break until the time of death, when a person is said to expire or "breathe his last."

When breathing, we inhale and exhale air. The average length of the current of air we regularly exhale is 9 inches. When one sings, the current is about 12 inches long; when we eat it measures about 15 inches. During sleep, we exhale a column of 22 1/2 inches; during physical exercise, heavy work, running, or similar activities, the length is even greater. By decreasing the length of the column of exhaled air, we prolong our life; by increasing the length, we shorten it.

According to the Vedas, the span of human life is 100 years. A sacred text, the *Svarodaya Yoga*, describes the interconnection between the rate of breathing and the life span. A human being in ancient times breathed 12–13 times a minute and lived 100 years. (In the present age, the rate is 15–16 times a minute, and consequently the life span is shorter.) For an elephant, the rate is 11–12 times a

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

minute and the longevity is 100 years; for a tortoise, 4–5 times and 150–155 years; for a monkey, 31–32 times and 20–21 years; and for a hare, 38–39 times and 8 years.

The nature of a person's breathing indicates the quality of his mind. A person whose breath is heavy and coarse is usually of crude mentality. A certain kind of quick breathing is considered a sign of short life. As breathing is the clearest indicator of the actual condition of our mind at any particular time, any disturbances or restlessness of mind are reflected in changes in our breathing. When a person is angry, fearful, anxious, depressed, excited, or under the influence of passion, his heart pounds and his breathing becomes rapid, shallow, irregular, and disharmonious. At these times the breath generally flows through only one nostril. On the other hand, when a person is calm, collected, controlled, and poised, his breathing is regular, harmonious, rhythmic, and light. At such times the breath flows through both nostrils. So when our mind is calm, our breath also is calm, and when our mind is restless or tense, our breathing becomes irregular and arrhythmic. *Pranayama* seeks to make the mind tranquil by the control and regulation of breathing.

But *pranayama* in a deeper and truer sense is much more than just control and regulation of breath. The Sanskrit *pranayama* is a compound word consisting of *prana,* which means vital force, and *ayama,* which indicates restraint. *Prana* is therefore not just breath: it is cosmic energy. Breath is the gross manifestation of *prana,* which is subtle. Just as we are immersed in air, so are we immersed in *prana.* When we breathe in air, we are taking in both air and *prana. Prana* is ever awake and ever-active in us.

Prana is described in the sacred texts of Yoga and Vedanta as having five modifications, according to its five different functions. The names of the five modifications are *prana, apana, samana, udana,* and *vyana.* The function of *prana* is respiration; of *apana,* excretion; of *samana,* digestion; of *udana,* swallowing of food, helping in sleep, and also separating the subtle body from the physical body at the time of death; and of *vyana,* circulation of blood. The seat of *prana* is the heart; of *apana,* the organs of evacuation; of *samana,* the area of the navel; of *udana,* the throat; while *vyana* is all-pervading and

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

moves throughout the body, guarding it against disease and maintaining equilibrium.

Prana is the manifestation in each of us of the Cosmic Life Force. Through the physical act of breathing, the life force within each of us is in constant contact with the cosmic life force. Without our knowledge or conscious effort, the physiological process of inbreathing and outbreathing is going on continuously day and night, during waking and sleeping. By exercising control over our breathing, we can control *prana*. Control of *prana* leads to control of the mind, because without *prana* the mind ceases to vibrate and comes to a standstill. The process by which *prana* is controlled is known as *pranayama*. Swami Vivekananda explains the meaning as follows:

> This body is very near to us, nearer than anything in the external universe; and the mind is nearer than the body. But the prana which is working this mind and body is the nearest. It is a part of the prana that moves the universe. In the infinite ocean of prana, this little wave of prana which represents our own energies, mental and physical, is the nearest to us. If we can succeed in controlling that little wave, then alone can we hope to control the whole of prana. The yogi who has done this gains perfection; no longer is he under any power. He becomes almost almighty, almost all-knowing.... Pranayama really means controlling the motion of the lungs, and this motion is associated with the breath. Not that the breath produces it; on the contrary, it produces the breath. This motion draws in the air by pump action. Prana moves the lungs; the movement of the lungs draws in the air. So pranayama is not breathing, but controlling that muscular power which moves the lungs. That muscular power which is transmitted through the nerves to the muscles and from them to the lungs, making them move in a certain manner, is the prana we have to control through the practice of pranayama. When this prana has become controlled, then we shall immediately find that all the other actions of prana in the body will slowly come under control.[1]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

There is an intimate connection between *prana* and the mind. *Prana* may be compared to the wind and the mind to fire. As wind fans the fire, so also *prana* fans the mind. When the wind is stopped, the fire becomes steady. In the same way, when the *prana* is stopped, the mind becomes steady.

Pranayama in the Yoga and Vedanta Traditions

Pranayama forms an important part of the Yoga system of Patanjali. Aphorism 49 of the "Sadhana Pada" (chapter on the practice of concentration) of Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms* says: "This (*asana*, or posture) having been accomplished, *pranayama*, which is the cessation of inhalation and exhalation, follows." *Pranayama* is to be performed only after posture has been perfected. Perfection in posture does not mean just the capacity to remain more or less in the same position. It means the ability to keep the body fixed in one position without making any movement of any kind, yet without being rigid in any way. Referring to posture, the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says:

> The wise man should hold his body steady, with the three [upper] parts [the chest, neck, and head] erect, turn his senses, with the help of the mind, toward the heart, and by means of the raft of Brahman [i.e., repetition of Om and meditation on its meaning] cross the fearful torrents of the world.[2]

Regarding appropriate posture for meditation, the *Bhagavad Gita* says: "He should sit firm, holding his body, neck, and head erect and still, and gaze steadily at the tip of his nose, without looking around."[3]

The goal of perfection in posture is to forget the body altogether. The posture is said to be perfected when the seeker is able to easily remain seated in the same posture for four hours and twenty minutes without any movement or discomfort. According to another source, the duration is three hours. The period of time, which is mentioned in different texts, merely gives an approximate idea of the meaning of the mastery of posture.

Pranayama practiced with a restless mind cannot be regarded as part of Yoga. The practice does not become conducive to *samadhi* unless steadiness of the body and one-pointedness of the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

mind are maintained during the practice. The mind should concentrate upon the object of meditation during each inhalation and exhalation, and when this is mastered, the suspension of breath is to be practiced. The suspension of breath and the mind's concentration on the subject are to be made as a single effort. The seers of Vedanta recommend the disciplines of Patanjali's Yoga for the attainment of *samadhi*, by which the Knowledge of Brahman is directly realized.

The *Bhagavad Gita* mentions *pranayama* as a form of sacrifice:

> Some, again, constantly practicing the regulation of *prana*, offer the oblation of *prana* into *apana*, and *apana* into *prana*, or stop the passage of both *prana* and *apana*. Yet others, restricting their food, offer their *pranas* into the *pranas*.[4]

"*Prana* into *apana*" in the verse refers to a form of *pranayama* called *puraka* (filling in); "*apana* into *prana*" refers to another form, called *rechaka* (emptying); "stop the passage" indicates the third kind of *pranayama*, known as *kumbhaka*. Regarding the question of "restricting their food," some teachers of Yoga instruct the student to fill half his stomach with food and one quarter with air, leaving one quarter free for the movement of air. "Offer their *pranas*" describes a method of *pranayama* by which the aspirant controls a life-breath and sacrifices into it all the other life-breaths, these latter becoming, as it were, merged in the former. The different kinds of breath control referred to here are described in the practices of *raja yoga* and *hatha yoga*.

The *Bhagavad Gita* makes another reference to *pranayama*:

> He who, at the time of passing away, steady in mind, filled with love, and armed with the strength of yoga, well fixes his *prana* between his brows and meditates on the omniscient and primal Being, the Ruler, the Dispenser of all, who is subtler than an atom, whose form is beyond comprehension, and who, like the glorious sun, is beyond all darkness—he who thus meditates reaches the resplendent Supreme Person.[5]

The words "well fixes his *prana* between his brows" refer to a kind of *pranayama*. The *Atma Upanishad* says:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> Now about the Paramatman: Verily He is to be worshipped according to the precepts of the Vedas. And He (reveals Himself) to one who, through the yoga of pranayama, pratyahara, and samadhi, or through reasoning, meditates on the Adhyatma [the reality underlying the innermost individual Self].[6]

The *Yoga Vasishtha* prescribes *pranayama* for control of mind and eradication of desires. According to this text, the vibration of the mind is manifested in the breath. It is this vibration that heightens the diversities of the sense-perceived world. When this vibration is controlled through control of breath, the mind becomes tranquil. *Pranayama*, according to a commentary on this same text, is the last of four ways of subduing the restless mind (the first three are holy company, renouncing desires, and worshipping the Divine). When the first three ways prove ineffective, *pranayama* is to be practiced as a last resort.

Pranayama forms part of the fifteen-step practice described by Shankaracharya in his *Aparokshanubhuti*, although he gives a different interpretation of the meaning of *pranayama:*

> The restraint of all modifications of the mind by regarding all mental states like the *chitta* as Brahman alone, is called *pranayama.* The negation of the phenomenal world is known as *rechaka* [breathing out], the thought "I am verily Brahman" is called *puraka* [breathing in], and the steadiness of that thought thereafter is called *kumbhaka* [restraining the breath]. This is the real course of *pranayama* for the enlightened, whereas the ignorant only torture the nose.[7]

Patanjali maintains that the mind becomes naturally calm when its communication with the external world is cut off by restraint of the breath. But according to Shankaracharya, the breath is entirely dependent on the mind and not vice versa. Thus, instead of trying to restrain the breath, one should always try to control the mind through persuasion and dispassion. When the mind is controlled, restraint of the breath follows as a matter of course.

Further, the *Mukti Upanishad* says, "It is not possible on the part of one to control the mind by sitting up again and again except

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

through the approved means [correct practice of yoga]."[8] The *Yogatattva Upanishad* declares: "How could *jnana* (knowledge) capable of giving *moksha* (liberation) arise suddenly without yoga? And even yoga becomes powerless in securing *moksha* when it is devoid of *jnana*. So the aspirant seeking emancipation should practice firmly both yoga and *jnana*."[9]

Manu says: "Let the defects be burnt up by *pranayama*."[10] The *Vishnu Purana* speaks of *pranayama* as an accessory to yoga: "He who wants the air known as *pranayama* by practice is said to have secured *pranayama*."[11] According to Patanjali, *pranayama* removes the veil of the mind.[12] There is no purificatory action greater than *pranayama*, which frees the mind from distractions and makes it one-pointed. It kindles the fire of yoga within and burns all the impurities that block the perception of the Self. *Pranayama* is conducive to good health and a steady mind, both of which are necessary for success in meditation.

Control of *prana* to reach the realm of the superconscious has been practiced in different ways by the various traditions of spiritual thought. In almost every country there are sects that advocate control of *prana* in some form or other to attain their goal. These sects include faith healers, mind healers, spiritualists, and hypnotists. All of them unconsciously practice control of *prana*. Referring to them, Swami Vivekananda says: "They have stumbled on the discovery of a force and are using it unconsciously without knowing its nature; but it is the same as what the yogi uses, and it comes from *prana*."[13]

The Philosophy of *Pranayama*

According to the sacred texts of Yoga and Vedanta, creation is a cyclical process of evolution and involution. At the beginning of a cycle, all the material entities of the universe evolve out of *akasha*, the all-pervading and all-penetrating space; after enduring for a length of time, they again dissolve into *akasha*. The driving force behind this evolution is *prana*, which is the primordial energy. *Prana* begins to vibrate at the beginning of creation in a particular cycle, causing the *akasha* to evolve. And again at the end of the cycle, all forces of evolution return to *prana*. The *Rig Veda* says:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

"Motionless did That [the Supreme Spirit] vibrate, alone with Its own glory one. Beyond That nothing did exist."[14] The *Katha Upanishad* says: "Whatever there is—the whole universe—vibrates because it has gone forth from Brahman, which exists as its Ground."[15]

Prana is like the breath of Brahman, the Supreme Spirit. The process of evolution and involution has been compared to the outbreathing and inbreathing of Brahman. *Prana* is thus the primordial energy that vibrates as the life force in every living being. The universe is in a state of constant vibration. The difference between one entity and another is in the rate of vibration. According to the *Vedanta Sutras*, *prana*, which vibrates in the form of Brahman, is Brahman Itself. *Prana* is the sum total of all energy that is manifest in the universe. *Prana* is the connecting link between the individual soul and the Supreme Soul, which is Brahman. By controlling *prana*, we are able to control our mind and attune our individual life to the Cosmic Life. Regarding *prana*, Swami Vivekananda says: "It is the *prana* that is manifesting as motion; it is the *prana* that is manifesting as gravitation, as magnetism. It is the *prana* that is manifesting as the actions of the body, as the nerve currents, as thought force."[16] The mind is controlled when the vibrations of *prana* are controlled by regulating the breath. Then the individual consciousness comes in contact with the Universal Consciousness.

The ultimate goal of the practice of *pranayama* is to awaken our dormant spiritual consciousness, the coiled-up *kundalini* energy. According to the sacred texts of Yoga, there are three subtle channels in our spinal column for the passage of this energy: the *pingala* on the right, the *ida* on the left, and the *sushumna* in the middle. The *sushumna* rises along the center of the spinal cord. In ordinary persons the *sushumna* canal is closed at the lower extremity, and no energy is able to pass through it: *kundalini*, the inner consciousness, remains in a state of sleep and dream, as it were, at the bottom of the spine.

Along the *sushumna* are the centers of consciousness located at successive levels corresponding to the base of the spine, the organ of generation, the navel, the heart, the throat, the area between the eyebrows, and the crown of the head. When the dormant *kundalini* is roused to action, it travels up the *sushumna* canal. When the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

center at the crown of the head is reached, individual consciousness becomes united with the all-pervading Universal Consciousness. As the *kundalini* rises from center to center, layer after layer of the mind opens up and the universe is perceived by the seeker in its subtle and causal forms. By reaching the topmost center, the seeker attains *samadhi*, or union with the absolute Pure Consciousness. This union is the goal of Yoga.

So Swami Vivekananda says:

> Whenever there has been any manifestation of what is called supernatural power or wisdom, there a little current of the Kundalini must have found its way into the Sushumna. Only, in the vast majority of such cases, the people had ignorantly stumbled on some practice which set free a minute portion of the coiled-up Kundalini. All worship, consciously or unconsciously, leads to this end. The man who thinks that he is receiving a response to his prayers does not know that the fulfillment comes from his own nature, that he has succeeded, by the mental attitude of prayer, in waking up a bit of this infinite power which is coiled up within himself. Thus what men ignorantly worship under various names, through fear and tribulation, the yogi declares to the world to be the real power coiled up in every being, the Mother of eternal happiness.[17]

The rousing of the *kundalini* is the only way to Self-Knowledge or Self-Realization, and *pranayama* is considered one of the means to accomplish that.

The Psychology of *Pranayama*

Pranayama forms an important part of the disciplines of Yoga for controlling the mind and awakening the spiritual consciousness. We have seen that according to Yoga, the mind never becomes controlled unless it is controlled consciously, and this must be achieved by controlling the effects of the mind's restlessness. As we know, the restlessness of the mind is reflected in the restlessness of the body, the speech, and especially the breathing. So through fixed posture, observance of silence, and practice of *pranayama*, the three effects are overcome.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The Yoga system does not absolutely depend upon discriminatory reasoning to attain its goal of Self-realization. Its methodology is to strengthen the willpower. Reason follows the path of persuasion. It wants to convince the intellect about the evil effects of wrong habits and tendencies, and persuade it to detach itself from them gradually. But when such habits and tendencies become too deeply rooted, reason is helpless to do anything. So the Yoga system argues that reason by itself cannot uproot the cause of ignorance, attachment, and delusion. Reason, it maintains, is ineffective against an unruly and recalcitrant mind that is deeply ingrained with perverted habits and tendencies. The roots of delusion and of contrary habits and tendencies, affecting our hormones, glands, blood, and nerves, cannot be destroyed simply by intellectual analysis. The whole person—physically, mentally, and spiritually—must rise up to accomplish the task.

Practice of mind control may be subjective or objective or a combination of both. The paths of knowledge and devotion advocate the subjective way of control. In the subjective way, the senses are controlled by the mind and the mind by the intellect. The Yoga system proceeds from the opposite direction: it seeks to get control of the mind through control and regulation of posture, speech, and breath, and it considers reasoning and detachment complementary means to such objective control of the mind. The methodology of the Yoga system emphasizes the necessity of the objective way of controlling the mind; it demonstrates how we can alter the constitution of our mind by controlling and regulating our posture, speech, and breath.

Pranayama is a natural process. Control of breath, as a means of controlling the mind, is nothing exotic or unnatural. Everyone unconsciously practices control of breath in some form or another. Our breathing influences our moods of our mind and our moods influence our breathing. For example, when we read an interesting book or concentrate intensely on a mathematical problem, our breathing becomes very slow, with much of the breath being retained within the lungs, and the effect of *pranayama* is achieved unconsciously.

Even an orthodox follower of Vedanta, through his practice of meditation and self-analysis, unconsciously attains the result of *pranayama.* It comes to him automatically. The Yoga system, however, calls for the conscious practice of *pranayama* in order to

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

attain its goal of Self-Realization: Self-Realization depends upon uninterrupted meditation; uninterrupted meditation depends upon whole-hearted concentration; and whole-hearted concentration depends upon total withdrawal of the mind from its worldly preoccupations. *Pranayama* is an effective means to accomplish this task of withdrawal.

What *Pranayama* Is Not

Pranayama is not deep breathing or a practice of breathing in and out rhythmically, in a measured way, without interruption. In such rhythmic breathing exercises, the practitioner may measure the length of inhalation and exhalation by counting one, two, three, and so on, or by repeating a sacred word for each count. Deep breathing increases the intake of oxygen and the flow of *prana* into the body, and this practice can harmonize the system, calm the nerves, and promote health—but it is not to be confused with real *pranayama*.

Pranayama is also not simply breathing alternately through the nostrils, though practice of such alternate breathing is meant for the purification of the nerves and, according to some traditions, is considered preparatory to the actual practice of *pranayama*. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says:

> The yogi of well-regulated endeavours should control the *pranas;* when they are quieted he should breathe out through the nostrils. Then let him undistractedly restrain his mind, as a charioteer restrains his vicious horses.[18]

Referring to Shankaracharya's commentary on this verse, Swami Vivekananda in his *Raja-Yoga* says:

> After one has learnt to have a firm, erect seat, one has to perform, according to certain schools, a practice called the purification of the nerves. This part has been rejected by some as not belonging to Raja-Yoga; but since so great an authority as the commentator Shankaracharya advises it, I think it fitting that it should be mentioned, and I will quote his own directions from his commentary on the Svetasvatara Upanishad: "The mind whose dross has been cleared away by pranayama becomes fixed in Brahman; therefore

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

pranayama is taught. First the nerves are to be purified; then comes the power to practise pranayama. Stopping the right nostril with the thumb, draw in air through the left nostril according to capacity; then without any interval, eject the air through the right nostril, closing the left one. Again inhaling through the right nostril according to capacity, eject through the left. Practising this three or five times at four periods of the day—before dawn, during midday, in the evening, and at midnight—one attains purity of the nerves in fifteen days or a month. Then begins pranayama." Practice is absolutely necessary. You may sit down and listen to me by the hour every day, but if you do not practise, you will not get one step farther. It all depends on practice. We never understand these things until we experience them. We have to see and feel them for ourselves. Simply listening to explanations and theories will not do.[19]

The sage Yajnavalkya, as quoted by Shankaracharya, gives the following direction for the purification of nerves and *pranayama*.

After practising the postures as desired, according to the rules, O Gargi, a man who has conquered the postures will practise pranayama. "Seated in an easy posture, on a [deer or tiger] skin placed on kusa grass, worshipping Ganapati with fruits and sweetmeats, placing the right palm on the left, holding the neck and head in the same line, the lips closed and firm, facing the east or the north, the eyes fixed on the tip of the nose, avoiding too much food or fasting, the nadis should be purified, without which the practice will be fruitless. Thinking of [the seed-word] Hum, at the junction of the pingala and the ida (the right and the left nostrils), the ida should be filled with external air in twelve seconds; then the yogi meditates on fire in the same place, with the word Rung, and while meditating thus, slowly ejects the air through the pingala. Again filling in, through the pingala, the air should be slowly ejected through the ida in the same way. This should be practised for three or four years, or three or four months, according to the directions of a guru, in secret (alone in a room), in the early morning,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

at midday, in the evening, and at midnight [until] the nerves become purified. Lightness of body, clear complexion, good appetite, and hearing of the Nada are the signs of the purification of the nerves. Then should be practised pranayama, composed of rechaka (exhalation), kumbhaka (retention), and puraka (inhalation). Joining the prana with the apana is pranayama.

After filling the body from the head to the feet in sixteen seconds, the prana is to be expelled in thirty-two seconds, and for sixty-four, kumbhaka should be practised.

There is another pranayama, in which kumbhaka should first be made for sixty-four seconds, then the prana should be expelled in sixteen, and the body next filled in sixteen seconds.

By pranayama the impurities of the body are expelled; by dharana, the impurities of the mind; by pratyahara, the impurities of attachment; and by samadhi is taken off everything that hides the lordship of the Soul.[20]

Shri Krishna in the *Uddhava Gita* says:

Should the body of a Yogi who is but practising Yoga and is not yet an adept in it, be overtaken by troubles that may have cropped up in the course of it, then the following remedies are prescribed.

Some of these troubles he should burn up through Yogic concentration [e.g., by concentrating on the sun and the moon, he should remove sensations of cold and heat, respectively], some [rheumatism, etc.] through postures coupled with retention of breath, and some [those due to planets, snakes, etc.] through austerities, mantras, and medicines.

Some evils [such as lust, etc.] he should slowly kill through meditation on Me and the chanting of My name, etc., and some [such as haughtiness, etc.] through service unto the great Masters of Yoga.[21]

The practice of alternate breathing helps to clear any blockage in the inflow or outflow of *prana.* However, since alternate breathing interrupts the process of normal respiration to some extent, it

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

should be practiced with great caution and under the guidance of an expert.

Pranayama Proper

Actual *pranayama* begins when the breath is stopped for a period of time between inhalation and exhalation. When the air is retained within after inhalation, there is a cessation of the movement of breath. This is one kind of *pranayama.* Similarly, if the breath is held after expulsion of air, that also is *pranayama.* It is the retention of breath *(kumbhaka)*, following either inhalation *(puraka)* or exhalation *(rechaka)*, that constitutes actual *pranayama.* According to some texts, retention of breath after exhalation is the Vedic form of *pranayama,* while retention after inhalation is the Tantric form.

Pranayama is practiced with the three components: *puraka, kumbhaka,* and *rechaka,* following a formula ratio of 1:4:2. That is to say, retention should be four times longer than inhalation and two times longer than exhalation. The duration of retention can be gradually increased over a long period of time. Such gradual increase may take the form of 2:8:4; 3:12:6; or 4:16:8.

The following is an illustration of the basic form of *pranayama* using the formula 4:16:8:

1. Close the right nostril with the thumb of your right hand. Draw in the breath gently through the left nostril. As you do this, mentally count up to 4.
2. Then close the left nostril with the third and fourth fingers of your right hand. With both nostrils closed, retain the breath while counting up to 16.
3. Release the right nostril and breathe out slowly, counting up to 8, keeping the left nostril closed.
4. With the left nostril still closed and the right one open, breathe in slowly, counting up to 4.
5. Close the right nostril. With both nostrils closed, retain the breath, counting up to 16.
6. Release the left nostril and breathe out slowly, counting up to 8, keeping the right nostril closed.

The above is known as "one round" of practice.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Kumbhaka

Kumbhaka is of three kinds: retaining the breath inside the lungs; holding the breath outside; and stopping the breath gradually, either inside or outside. *Kumbhaka* is the most essential component of *pranayama*. Since it involves stopping and regulating breath, its practice is fraught with many dangers and risks. Therefore, the practice of *pranayama* with *kumbhaka* ought to be learned only by a qualified seeker from a competent teacher.

When *kumbhaka* is practiced without necessary preparation and guidance, its practice may lead to incurable disease, insanity, and uncontrollable or violent gross impulses. The seeker desiring to practice *pranayama* must be ready, willing, and able to cut himself off completely and forever from the cravings of sense enjoyments, gross or subtle. He must be established in the practice of *brahmacharya*. Emphasizing the need for *brahmacharya*, Swami Vivekananda says:

> The yogis say that that part of the human energy which is expressed through sexual action and sexual thought, when checked and controlled, easily becomes changed into ojas [spiritual energy]; and since the Muladhara guides these, the yogi pays particular attention to that center. He tries to convert all his sexual energy into ojas. It is only the chaste man or woman who can create ojas and store it in the brain; that is why chastity has always been considered the highest virtue. A man feels that if he is unchaste, his spirituality goes away; he loses mental vigor and moral stamina. That is why, in all the religious orders in the world which have produced spiritual giants, you will always find absolute chastity insisted upon. That is why there came into existence monks, who gave up marriage. There must be perfect chastity in thought, word, and deed. Without it the practice of raja-yoga is dangerous and may lead to insanity. If people practice raja-yoga and at the same time lead an impure life, how can they expect to become yogis?[22]

Mere suspension of breath does not make yogic *pranayama*. There are people who can naturally suspend breathing and even

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

remain buried alive for a long time. But such suspension has no spiritual significance. The suspension of breath that either arrests modifications of the mind or makes it one-pointed is what constitutes yogic *kumbhaka.* Stability of mind during the practice of *kumbhakas* gradually leads to *samadhi.* That is why it is said that twelve *kumbhakas* make one unit of *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the mind) and twelve *pratyaharas* make one unit of *dharana* (concentration). Thus, unless the mind is steadied and made free from attachment to sense objects, one fails to derive any spiritual benefit from *pranayama.* Such *pranayama* is only a physical feat. Suspension of breath is an external expression of *samadhi* and not its internal or real characteristic.

Different Kinds of *Pranayama*

The three components (inhalation, retention, and exhalation), when regulated by place, time, and number, make three kinds of *pranayama.* As Patanjali says:

> Its modifications [motions of *pranayama*] are threefold, namely, external, internal, and motionless; they are regulated by place, time, and number; and further, they are either long or short.[23]

Place

Place refers to the practice of retaining *prana* in some particular part of the body. Place can be seen as either external or internal. External place is thought of as being from the tip of the nose to the point up to which the flow of breath is extended. Internal place is that region where the air moves inside one's body, up to the region of the heart. Starting from the heart, the entire body from head to foot constitutes internal place. In the practice of *pranayama* regulated by external place, the seeker tries to make the length of exhalation as short as possible. In the practice regulated by internal place, the inhaled air is felt in the region of the heart. The heart is thought of as shining sky. The glowing form of one's Ishtam, or favorite form of the Divine, may also be meditated upon in the heart.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Time

Time refers to the duration of inhalation, retention, and exhalation. Such duration is measured in terms of *matra*, which corresponds to one second, or the time covered by the twinkling of an eye. But duration also indicates how long the *prana* should be held in a particular part of the body or center of consciousness.

Pranayama regulated by time has three varieties: mild, medium, and intense, depending upon the duration. In the mild variety, inhalation consists of 12 *matras*, retention of 48 *matras*, and exhalation of 24 *matras*. In the medium variety, inhalation consists of 24 *matras*, retention of 96, and exhalation of 48. In the intense variety, inhalation consists of 36 *matras*, retention of 144, and exhalation of 72. The medium variety is recommended for those who have mastered the mild variety, while the intense variety is only for those who have mastered the medium variety.

In *pranayama* regulated by time, when the time is measured with the repetition of a sacred word (Om or the Gayatri mantra), it is known as *sagarbha pranayama*. Following this method, *pranayama* is practiced for a specified period of time, and the period of time is measured by a definite number of *japas* (repetitions) of a sacred word. When the measurement of time is not attended by *japa*, such repetition is called *agarbha pranayama*. According to the traditions, *sagarbha pranayama* is one hundred times more powerful than the *agarbha* variety.

Number

Number refers to the number of times *pranayama* is to be performed, and at what rate it is to be practiced. According to some texts, *pranayama* should be practiced four times a day—early morning, midday, evening, and midnight—and up to a maximum of eighty rounds each time. The number of rounds should be increased gradually and carefully.

Other Forms of *Pranayama*

Pranayama *by Suspending Inhalation and Exhalation*

In this type, both inbreathing and outbreathing are suspended all at once and for as long as possible.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Pranayama *with Gradual Suspension of Breath*

Here there is a gradual stopping of the course of both inhalation and exhalation. This type of *pranayama* is characterized by the absence of any movement of breath following the complete cessation of inhalation and exhalation.

Pranayama *for the Awakening of the* Kundalini

The seeker draws in the breath slowly through the left nostril and concentrates on the *ida,* the left nerve current, then sends the nerve current down the spinal column, striking the lowest center (described by the sacred texts as triangular in form), the seat of the *kundalini.* He holds the current there for some time by closing both nostrils and thereafter releases the right nostril, breathing out slowly and gently. Again, without any interval, he reverses the exercise, breathing in through the right nostril, holding the breath inside, and then releasing the breath through the left nostril. His inhalation-retention-exhalation begins with the formula 3:12:6 or 4:16:8. The duration of retention is increased carefully and cautiously, for premature increase can injure the seeker. This exercise is performed three or four times in the morning and again in the evening. The unit of time, or *matra,* in *kumbhaka* is measured by the mental utterance of the word Om. For example, if the form is 4:16:8, four repetitions of Om measure the duration of inhalation, sixteen repetitions the duration of retention, and eight that of exhalation. With the awakening of the *kundalini,* the seeker experiences the sensations of heat and light at the base of the spine. As the *kundalini* travels upward, it illumines the different centers of consciousness. The universe is perceived as more and more homogeneous and unified. Finally, when it reaches the crown of the head, the individual consciousness merges in the ocean of all-pervading Pure Consciousness.

Important Points Regarding *Pranayama*

The sacred traditions of *pranayama* suggest that the following points be remembered by one devoted to this practice:

1. The seeker must be in good health.
2. *Pranayama* is to be practiced in a controlled manner, keeping

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

a watchful eye on physical and mental well-being. Physical or mental overexertion is to be avoided.

3. *Pranayama* practiced without meditation, *japa,* or spiritual motivation makes the mind restless and can result in mental derangement.
4. There must be strict regulation of diet. Overeating impedes progress in *pranayama.* Eating light, nutritious foods and keeping the stomach partially empty are desirable. In general, the seeker should follow a *sattvika* form of diet, such as that described in *Bhagavad Gita* 17.8. One should avoid all stimulants and intoxicants.

A strict diet is of vital importance in the practice of *pranayama.* The aspirant is advised to give up salt; mustard; sour, hot, and pungent food; bitter things; and asafoetida, as well as the company of women, much walking, and too much fasting. During the early stages of practice, a diet consisting of milk, clarified butter, wheat, gram pulse (lentils), and red rice is said to favor progress. According to the *Laws of Manu,* the following items of food are to be avoided:

> The food of a king takes away brilliant energy; the food of a servant (takes away) the splendour of the Veda; the food of a goldsmith, longevity; that of a leatherworker, fame. The food of a manual labourer kills off the progeny (of the man who eats it); that of a washerman (saps his) strength; the food of the hordes or of whores cuts him off from (all desirable) worlds. The food of a doctor is pus, the food of a woman who runs after men is semen, the food of a money-lender is excrement, and the food of an arms-dealer is dirt. Wise men say that the food of those others whose food is not to be eaten, enumerated (above) in order, is skin, bones, and hair. Should a man unknowingly eat the food of one or another of these, a three-day fast (is required).[24]

In the beginning, fat can be taken in small quantities, but the seeker must eventually give up the consumption of fat completely. However, diet should be controlled gradually.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

5. *Pranayama* is not to be practiced with a full stomach.
6. The seeker should use lukewarm water for bathing, not hot or cold.
7. He should wear loose-fitting clothes that do not obstruct the flow of *prana* in the body.

Risks in the Practice of *Pranayama*

1. The practice of *pranayama* forcibly rouses the subconscious mind. Unless the seeker is already established in the practice of moral purity, *pranayama* brings reaction and creates havoc. There are many nonspiritual tendencies latent in us. When these are forced up to the conscious level, they may become prominent, and with our feeble self-control we may be unable to restrain them. Coursing through the nerves and the brain, they could rouse violent gross impulses. The brain and the nerves, habituated to gross thoughts and perceptions, cannot bear the intensity of subtle thoughts and perceptions. So the practice of *pranayama* can wake up not only the angels in us, but also the devils. Most often, the conditions essential for the success of *pranayama* are carelessly ignored. Many people are deluded by the promises and prospects of *pranayama* and forget that the mind precedes the body and fashions and controls it, not vice versa. We cannot generate spiritual longing merely by making breathing rhythmic and developing the capacity of retention of breath. The mind refuses to yield to the mechanical control of breath.

2. *Pranayama* rouses the spiritual consciousness and causes it to course upward but unless there is a strong motivation for this journey to proceed upward, the awakened *kundalini* has every chance of falling. And when it falls, it does so violently, going down to the lowest depths. So Swami Vivekananda says that awakening the *kundalini* just a little bit is dangerous. Once awakened, it must be led upward. *Pranayama* should never be practiced by one incapable of observing continence *(brahmacharya)*.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

3. *Pranayama* may overemphasize preoccupation with the body and distract the mind from its supreme goal, which is transcending body-consciousness in order to contact the Pure Self within.
4. The practice of *pranayama* may open the door to the untimely experience of occult phenomena, the lure of which deludes the seeker on his spiritual journey.

Efficacy of Pranayama

There is an element of fascination and charm about the practice of *pranayama*. It is often considered a quick and easy means of attaining the spiritual goal. In our age of technology, *pranayama* is thought of as a mechanical device, and its practice therefore has tremendous appeal. But does it really accomplish the task? Can spirituality be generated by mechanical means, or can the awakening of spiritual consciousness be hastened? Can we really gain mastery over our mind by controlling our breath and posture?

The seers and sages never advocated mere mechanical means to attain the spiritual goal. Spiritual unfoldment cannot be brought about artificially. Transformation of character cannot be hurried. Deep-seated habits and ingrained tendencies cannot be changed all of a sudden. Any hasty or violent method is bound to bring severe reactions. Those who resort to the practice of *pranayama* without having genuine spiritual hankering only harm themselves. So Shankaracharya says:

> The conviction of the Truth is seen to proceed from reasoning upon the salutary counsel of the wise, and not by bathing in the sacred waters, nor by gifts, nor by a hundred *pranayamas* (control of the vital force).
>
> Whoever seeks to realise the Self by devoting himself to the nourishment of the body, proceeds to cross a river by catching hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log.[25]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Part Five

Progress in Meditation

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

28. *Milestones of Progress*

An aspirant following the path of meditation is utterly alone. The world around him is not a world of tangible beings and things but one of thoughts and memories. Concentration is his only practice and a determined will his only support.

There is always a great gulf between meditation in theory and meditation in practice. Theoretically speaking, Self-Realization, the goal of meditation, seems to be a very easy thing to attain. One is not required to go anywhere or do anything other than to turn one's mind inward and concentrate on the Self. But in practice the circumstances are quite different: this turning the mind inward is the most difficult of all tasks. No theory or intellectual understanding of the goal is of any help to the aspirant in this respect.

While the goal of meditation is the same for everyone, the journey toward the goal is not the same. Each has to proceed in his own way according to his own capacity and available mental equipment. Success on the path of meditation depends not on anything exotic but on the aspirant's undaunted will and determined effort.

The follower of the path of meditation has only two watchwords: patience and perseverance. A solitary adventurer, he moves along in silence, contending at every step of the way with his own mind, which is by nature turbulent, stubborn, and restless. Even when such a mind seems to be calm and cooperative, it cannot be trusted, for it assumes many disguises at different stages of progress in order to resist, tempt, and delude the aspirant. Cynicism can and often does appear in the guise of reason,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

weakness as self-surrender, attachment as love, self-gratification as unselfish service, and sloth and sluggishness as spells of doubt and irresolution. An aspirant sometimes has to pass long stretches of time when, due to his mind's resistance and contrary tendencies, his meditation practice seems to be a huge self-deception. Sometimes he finds his practice dry, monotonous, and wearisome.

Journeying toward the goal is like climbing a narrow, winding mountain path. As the aspirant climbs, he encounters the same obstacle in a finer and subtler form at each stage of his journey. The only thing he can trust about his mind is the fact that his mind cannot be trusted, and unless he is alert and careful, he is certain to be duped.

It is difficult to measure progress in meditation by what one feels. Feeling good or bad about oneself does not always indicate the condition within. It may be that when an aspirant feels exalted and confident that he is making good progress, he may be really going downhill. On the other hand, it may be that when he feels totally lost, he is really making good progress. For this reason, many aspirants, notwithstanding their sincerity of purpose, frequently lose direction in this path or even drop out. Two questions naturally arise in this context: What is the guiding light for the aspirant in the wilderness of his thoughts and memories? Are there any milestones of progress in the path?

As stated earlier, meditation, according to both Yoga and Vedanta, is concentration upon a single object. When concentration becomes spontaneous, it takes the form of meditation, and meditation eventually culminates in *samadhi,* total absorption. But such complete absorption is not attained all at once: it is preceded by several successive stages of partial absorption. According to the scriptures of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra, there are certain specific signs by which an aspirant's progress in meditation can be ascertained. These signs include the following:

1. mystical experiences
2. rising of *kundalini,* or spiritual consciousness
3. quickness in performance

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

4. degree of detachment
5. stages of one-pointedness
6. stages of concentration
7. depths of absorption
8. experience of *kumbhaka,* or suspension of breath
9. depths of dispassion
10. stages of realization
11. experience of spiritual emotions
12. psychic powers and attainments

The objective manifestations are integration of personality and transformation of character. Both mystical experiences and the transformation of character serve as milestones in the path of meditation.

Mystical Experiences

Regarding mystical experiences, the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* mentions the following: "When *yoga* is practised, the forms which appear first and which gradually manifest Brahman are those of snow-flakes, smoke, sun, wind, fireflies, lightning, crystal, and the moon."[1] In other words, while practicing meditation the aspirant sees within, one after another, the visions of a snowfall, radiant smoke, and the brilliant sun. Then he feels within him a strong current of wind, followed by intense heat. Sometimes he sees in meditation the sky filled with fireflies or a dazzling flash of lightning, and sometimes the serene luster of crystal or of the moon. These visions indicate an aspirant's progress in meditation.

The same text further states:

> When earth, water, fire, air, and akasa arise, that is to say, when the five attributes of the elements, mentioned in the books on *yoga,* become manifest, then the yogi's body becomes purified by the fire of *yoga* and he is free from illness, old age, and death.[2]

That is, each of the five subtle elements (earth, water, fire, air, and ether) is endowed with its characteristic quality: earth with smell, water with taste, fire with form, air with touch, and ether

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

(akasha) with sound. Through concentration, the aspirant can experience these attributes. Thus, by concentrating on the tip of the nose, he enjoys a heavenly fragrance; by concentrating on the tip of the tongue, a heavenly flavor; by concentrating on the middle of the tongue, a heavenly touch; by concentrating on the root of the tongue, a heavenly sound.[3] By means of these perceptions, the aspirant's mind becomes steady in meditation, for it is then no longer attracted by outward objects.

Spiritual experiences vary from person to person, depending upon the extent of the progress made. Some of these relate to hearing. At a certain stage of concentration, an aspirant often experiences such phenomena as hearing within himself the pulsations of sound, the melody of bells ringing at a distance, and vibrations rising out of the depths of space, just like ripples produced in a pond when a stone is thrown in it. At a more advanced stage of concentration, he may hear the *anahata dhvani,* the eternal and uninterrupted vibration of the cosmic mind.

Another measure of progress is the vision of inner light. Once, when Swami Vivekananda was a young man (then known as Narendranath), he was visiting Sri Ramakrishna. Knowing that such a vision indicates an inborn habit of meditation, Sri Ramakrishna asked him: "Do you see a light when you fall asleep?" Narendranath answered in the affirmative and thought within himself that it was a phenomenon common to everybody:

> I used to see all my life a wonderful point of light between my eyebrows as soon as I would shut my eyes in order to go to sleep, and I used to observe attentively its various changes. So that it might be convenient to see it, I used to lie on my bed in the way people bow down, touching the ground with their foreheads. The extraordinary point kept changing its colours and, increasing in size, become gradually converted into the form of a ball and, bursting at last, covered my body from head to foot with white liquid light. As soon as that happened, I lost external consciousness and fell asleep. I believed that all people went to sleep that way. I was long under that impression. When I grew up and began to practise meditation, that point of light used

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> to come before me, first of all, as soon as I closed my eyes and I concentrated my mind on it. In those days I daily practiced meditation with a few friends according to the instruction of Maharshi Devendranath. We talked among ourselves about the nature of visions and experiences each of us had. At that time I came to know from what they said that they never had the vision of such light and that none of them went to sleep in that way.[4]

Visions of inner light include the vision of the form of the object of concentration. As his meditation deepens, an aspirant is able to picture within himself the object of concentration with more and more clarity and distinctness. For a beginner in meditation, the object of concentration is more imaginary than real; this becomes reversed as he progresses in concentration, and the object of concentration gradually begins to become more real to him than any tangible object.

Meditation is a process of devolution in which the aspirant voluntarily and consciously transcends the states of waking, dream, and dreamless sleep, finally reaching *Turiya,* or Pure Consciousness. Spiritual visions and experiences during meditation are faint glimpses of the state of Pure Consciousness. In order for these to be genuine indicators of progress, they must be conscious realizations, distinguishable from involuntary experiences in a dream. Spiritual experiences in dreams have no significance unless they serve as inducements for the practice of meditation and moral purification during the waking state.

Sri Ramakrishna describes the following spiritual experiences as indicators of progress in meditation:

> Man, looking outward, sees the gross; at that time his mind dwells in the anamayakosha, the gross body. Next is the subtle body. Functioning through the subtle body, the mind dwells in the manomayakosha and the vinanamayakosha. Next is the causal body. Functioning through the causal body the mind enjoys bliss; it dwells in the ananda-mayakosha This corresponds to the semi-conscious state experienced by Chaitanya. First of all, the mind loses itself

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

in the Great Cause. It disappears. It merges in the Great Cause. What one experiences after that cannot be described in words. In his inmost state of consciousness, Chaitanya enjoyed this experience. Do you know what this state is like? Dayananda described it by saying, "Come into the inner apartments and shut the door." Anyone and everyone cannot enter that part of the house.

I used to meditate on the flame of a light. I thought of the red part as gross, the white part inside the red as subtle, and the stick-like black part, which is the innermost of all, as the causal.

By certain signs you can tell when meditation is being rightly practised. One of them is that a bird will sit on your head, thinking you are an inert thing....

A person can achieve such single-mindedness in meditation that he will see nothing, hear nothing. He will not be conscious even of touch. A snake may crawl over his body, but he will not know it. Neither of them will be aware of the other.

In deep meditation the sense-organs stop functioning; the mind does not look outward. It is like closing the gate of the outer court in a house. There are five objects of the senses: form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. They are all left outside.

At the beginning of meditation the objects of the senses appear before the aspirant. But when the meditation becomes deep, they no longer bother him. They are left outside. How many things I saw during meditation! I vividly perceived before me a heap of rupees, a shawl, a plate of sweets, and two women with rings in their noses. "What do you want?" I asked my mind. "Do you want to enjoy any of these things?" "No," replied the mind, "I don't want any of them. I don't want anything but the Lotus Feet of God."[5]

Sri Ramakrishna further describes his own experiences:

There are certain characteristics of God-vision. One sees light, feels joy, and experiences the upsurge of a great current in one's chest, like the bursting of a rocket....

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

I had all the experiences that one should have, according to the scriptures, after one's direct perception of God. I behaved like a child, like a madman, like a ghoul, and like an inert thing.

I saw the visions described in the scriptures. Sometimes I saw the universe filled with sparks of fire. Sometimes I saw all the quarters glittering with light, as if the world were a lake of mercury. Sometimes I saw the world as if made of liquid silver. Sometimes, again, I saw all the quarters illumined as if with the light of Roman candles. So you see my experiences tally with those described in the scriptures.[6]

The Rising of *Kundalini*

Another indicator of progress in meditation is the experience of the upward movement of inner consciousness, described by the scriptures of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra as the awakening of the *kundalini* or "coiled-up power" described earlier. The *kundalini,* which symbolizes inner consciousness, usually remains dormant in an individual. According to tradition, there are three principal nerve channels in the spinal column of a human body for the passage of this energy. They are known as *ida, pingala,* and *sushumna.* The left side of the spinal cord is *ida,* the right is *pingala,* and that hollow canal which runs through the center of the spinal cord is *sushuma,* the most important nerve channel. Through *ida* all sense perceptions are received and sent to the brain, while through *pingala* all motor responses are transmitted from the brain to the body. In other words, all sensory impulses pass through *ida* and all motor reactions through *pingala.*

The spinal cord resembles a number of figure 8s placed horizontally and piled one on top of the other. The *sushumna* canal begins at the lowest extremity of the spine, runs up through the spine itself, and reaches to the top of the head. Contained within the *sushumna* canal are seven centers of consciousness, which have been described as lotuses. In ordinary persons, the canal of *sushumna* remains closed at the bottom, and each such lotus has its head hanging down. These seven centers represent seven planes of existence, ranging from the lowest plane of gross matter to the highest plane of pure bliss.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Following the vision of Vedanta, Tantra conceives of fourteen planes of existence known as fourteen worlds, or *lokas:* seven upper and seven lower. The seven upper worlds are *bhur, bhuvah, swah, mahah, janah, tapah,* and *satya;* and the seven lower worlds are known as *atala, vitala, sutala, rasatala, talatala, mahatala,* and *patala.* The earth, *bhuh-loka,* is the lowest of the upper worlds, and beneath it are the lower or nether worlds. *Swah* (or *swarga-loka*) is the sphere extending from the sun to the polestar, where after death people enjoy material happiness as a reward for their meritorious action on earth. *Bhuvar-loka* is the intermediary sphere between the two and extends from the earth to the sun. Above *swarga-loka* are the other four worlds: *mahah, janah, tapah,* and *satya,* inhabited by various forms of celestial beings endowed with greater and still greater visions of Truth at each higher plane of existence. In contrast, the netherworlds represent planes of grosser existence, with lesser and lesser visions of Truth at each lower plane.

The microcosm, according to both Vedanta and Tantra, is a miniature form of the macrocosm: whatever exists in the universe as a totality also exists in the human being as an individual. The human body has two parts: the upper consisting of the head and trunk, and the lower consisting of the legs. The spinal cord serves as the axis of the body, directly comparable to the axis of the earth. From the center of the body upward, consciousness is more manifest through the spine and the brain centers. Hence, the seven upper worlds are known to exist in an individual in an ascending order from the bottom of the spine to the crown of the head. These seven worlds of existence correspond to the seven centers of consciousness: five in the trunk, the sixth between the eyebrows, and the seventh at the top of the head.

These centers or lotuses (described in chapter 17) are not anatomical; they are spiritual and inwardly felt. Each lotus is characterized by a specific number of petals and color, representing a certain configuration of nerve channels, and each such configuration indicates a particular focus of inner consciousness.

The first center is called *muladhara* (root support). This center, located at the base of the spine, has four petals and is crimson in color. It manifests the earth aspect of matter, governs gross physical urges, and controls the sense of smell. Dwelling on

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

this level of existence, a human being is guided by gross, subconscious desires.

The second center is called *svadhisthana* (own abode). It is located at the base of the organ of generation, is of vermilion color, and has six petals. This center manifests the water aspect of matter, governs the sense of taste, and controls the sense organ of the palate. Existence at this plane is constantly swayed by gross impulses and imaginations and by various animal propensities.

The third center is known as *manipura* (city of jewels). It is situated in the region of the navel, has ten petals, and is of the color of heavy, dark rain clouds. This center manifests the fire aspect of matter and controls the impulses of perception, especially sight. As clouds obstruct the vision of the sun, so do the clouds of emotions and impulses obstruct the clear vision of Truth.

The fourth center is known as *anahata* (unobstructed). It is located in the spine at the level of the heart. It has twelve petals and is of the color of scarlet flame. This center manifests the air aspect of matter, governs the perception of touch, and controls the emotional being of our personality. Existence at this center is characterized by experiences that are subtle and spiritual as opposed to gross and material. One distinctive feature of this lotus is that its filaments are tinged with the rays of the sun. The fourth center is distinguished from the "lotus of the heart," which is eight-petaled and located below it. The lotus of the heart is not a center of consciousness but an inner recess resembling a lotus with its petals turning upward. This inner recess has been compared to a lotus because many nerve channels *(nadis)* proceed from the heart and spread all over the body like rays proceeding from the sun. The lotus of the heart is also known as *anandakanda* (root of bliss), in which concentration upon one's Chosen Ideal is usually practiced.

The fifth center is called *visuddha* (pure). It is located in the region corresponding to the throat. The lotus of this center has sixteen petals and is of smoky purple color. The fifth center manifests the ethereal aspect of matter and influences our perception of sound and, therefore, the organs of hearing, speech, and the power of expression. Existence at this center is marked by complete purity.

The sixth center is known as *ajna* (command). When the seeker goes beyond this center, he comes under the command of the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Divine from above. The lotus of this center is situated in the region between the eyebrows, has two petals, and is white in color. The sixth center is the actual seat of the mind and controls all our thoughts and visions, and the dynamic movements of our will. By reaching this center of consciousness, one attains a vision of Truth that is almost absolute in nature.

The seventh center is called *sahasrara.* It is located at the crown of the head and is the highest of all the centers of consciousness. The lotus of this center has a thousand petals, is as white as the silvery full moon, as bright as lightning, and contains all colors.[7] The *sahasrara* is the summit point where microconsciousness (the individual) and macroconsciousness (the totality) converge. It is the region of the First Cause, from which proceed all other causes, and here the awakened spiritual energy manifests in its full glory. Existence at the *sahasrara* represents dwelling in *satya-loka,* the realm of Pure Truth and Bliss. The various systems of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra describe this seventh center as the supreme state of consciousness; worshippers of Shiva (Shaivas) call this center the abode of Shiva; worshippers of Vishnu (Vaishnavas) call it the realm of Vishnu, the Supreme Purusha; and worshippers of Shakti (Shaktas) call it the realm of the Divine Mother. For the followers of Sankhya and Yoga it is where Purusha dwells in absolute freedom, and for the Vedantins it is where *jivatman* becomes one with Parabrahman.

Through the practice of meditation, the inner consciousness slowly becomes awakened and travels upward, following the canal of *sushumna* from the lowest center *(muladhara),* passing through the next five centers, and finally reaching the highest center *(sahasrara)* at the crown of the head. The awakening of the first center activates memories of the past; the second, gross impulses; the third, awareness of the sense of individuality. The awakening of the fourth center brings spiritual experiences and visions; the fifth, partial spiritual absorption; the sixth, deep spiritual absorption but still with faint I-consciousness *(savikalpa samadhi);* and the seventh, total spiritual absorption *(nirvikalpa samadhi).*

For most persons, the mind is forced to go back and forth between the three lower centers, those at the organs of evacuation (base of the spine) and generation and at the navel. At these stages, the aspirant's mind remains immersed in worldliness. It constantly

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

broods over the cravings of lust and greed—eating, sleeping, and procreation are its dominant preoccupations. All perceptions and cognitions of the mind are influenced by animal propensities.

But through the practice of meditation, when the aspirant's mind reaches the fourth center, he experiences his first spiritual awakening. New vistas open up before him, and he sees the same world in its fine and causal form. He sees light all around and visualizes the individual soul as a flame. When his mind reaches the fifth center, he wants to talk and hear only about God and does not enjoy anything else. Conversation on worldly subjects causes him great pain, and he immediately leaves a place where people are talking of these matters. Reaching the sixth center, the aspirant's mind is taken over by a deep spiritual absorption that is not only spontaneous but also continuous. He sees the living form of God, but he sees it like a light inside a lantern. He wants to touch the form but is unable to. Finally, when his mind reaches the seventh center, he attains total absorption; overcome by the intense inebriation of Pure Bliss, he loses all consciousness of the outer world. His mind no longer wants to return to the level of body consciousness. Only extraordinary souls can come down from that exalted state, but with great effort. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: "Their minds move between the sixth and the seventh planes. They run a boat race back and forth, as it were, between these two planes."[8]

Sri Ramakrishna, from his own experiences, describes the rising of inner consciousness *(kundalini)* and says:

> Sometimes the Spiritual Current rises through the spine, crawling like an ant. Sometimes, in samadhi, the soul swims joyfully in the ocean of divine ecstasy, like a fish. Sometimes, when I lie down on my side, I feel the Spiritual Current pushing me like a monkey and playing with me joyfully. I remain still. That Current, like a monkey, suddenly with one jump reaches the Sahasrara. That is why you see me jump up with a start. Sometimes, again, the Spiritual Current rises like a bird hopping from one branch to another. The place where it rests feels like fire. It may hop from Muladhara to Svadhisthana, from Svadhisthana to the heart, and thus gradually to the head. Sometimes the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Spiritual Current moves up like a snake. Going in a zigzag way, at last it reaches the head and I go into samadhi. A man's spiritual consciousness is not awakened unless his Kundalini is aroused.

The Kundalini dwells in the Muladhara. When it is aroused, it passes along the Sushumna nerve, goes through the centers of Svadhisthana, Manipura, and so on, and at last reaches the head. This is called the movement of the Mahavayu, the Spiritual Current. It culminates in samadhi. One's spiritual consciousness is not awakened by the mere reading of books. One should also pray to God. The Kundalini is aroused if the aspirant feels restless for God. To talk of Knowledge from mere study and hearsay! What will that accomplish?

Just before my attaining this state of mind, it had been revealed to me how the Kundalini is aroused, how the lotuses of the different centers blossom forth, and how this culminates in *samadhi.* This is a very secret experience. I saw a boy twenty-two or twenty-three years old, exactly resembling me, enter the Sushumna nerve and commune with the lotuses, touching them with his tongue. He began with the center at the anus and passed through the centers at the sexual organ, navel, and so on. The different lotuses of these centers—four-petalled, six-petalled, ten-petalled, and so forth—had been drooping. At his touch they stood erect. When he reached the heart—I distinctly remember it—and communed with the lotus there, touching it with his tongue, the twelve-petalled lotus, which was hanging head down, stood erect and opened its petals. Then he came to the sixteen-petalled lotus in the throat and the two-petalled lotus in the forehead. And last of all, the thousand-petalled lotus in the head blossomed. Since then I have been in this state.[9]

The traditions of Vedanta describe the seven centers of consciousness as seven "stations" of dwelling for the mind. An aspirant's progress in meditation is known by ascertaining the station to which his mind has risen.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

In the context of the awakening of the *kundalini* and the experiences that follow such awakening, Swami Vivekananda mentions the following:

> When the meditation is deep, one sees many wonderful things. While meditating at the Barangore Math, one day I saw the nerves Ida and Pingala. One can see them with a little effort. Then when one has a vision of the Sushumna, one can see anything one likes. If a man has unflinching devotion to the Guru, spiritual practices—meditation, japa, and so forth—come quite naturally; one need not struggle for them.[10]

There is, however, a danger for the aspirant when the awakening of the *kundalini* is little, untimely, or sudden, or when it is awakened by such artificial means as indulgence in emotionalism or premature or improper practices of *pranayama*, and so forth. Under such circumstances the awakened *kundalini*, instead of traveling upward, invariably falls back, bringing in its wake various violent and dangerous reactions. Hence Swami Vivekananda warns:

> During meditation suppress the emotional side altogether. That is a great source of danger. Those that are very emotional no doubt have their Kundalini rushing quickly upwards, but it is as quick to come down as to go up. And when it does come down, it leaves the devotee in a state of utter ruin. It is for this reason the Kirtanas [congregational religious singing and dancing] and other auxiliaries to emotional development have a great drawback. It is true that by dancing and jumping, etc. through a momentary impulse, that power is made to course upwards, but it is never enduring. On the contrary, when it traces back its course, it rouses violent lust in the individual.[11]

Quickness in Performance

Success in meditation, according to Patanjali, depends upon *samvega*, the intensely energetic practice of meditation and quickness of performance necessary for such practice. Such energetic practice and quickness in fulfilling the conditions, however, depend

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

upon the aspirant's physical and mental equipment, mastery over posture, ability to overcome the environment, self-control, worshipfulness, concentration of mind, and longing for the goal. The seeker is said to have gained perfect mastery over posture when he is able to remain seated easily in one place and in one posture for three hours (according to other texts, four hours and twenty minutes) without even blinking his eyes. When he is able to invoke his meditative mood in spite of distractions in the external world, he is said to have overcome the environment. He is said to be established in self-control when his aversion to sense enjoyment equals his innate abhorrence for "the excreta of a crow" (according to Shankaracharya). His self-control is said to be perfect when he is able to live among the objects of temptation without any form of attachment or aversion to them. His worshipfulness is measured by his self-surrender to God; his concentration of mind, by his inner absorption; and his longing for the goal, by his intense dispassion and indomitable effort.

The pace of an aspirant's progress in meditation depends upon how quickly or slowly he is able to fulfill these conditions. Progress is quick for those who either have been endowed with these masteries from birth or else have acquired them through intense effort. According to the Yoga System, there are five types of mind: (1) *kshipta*, or wandering; (2) *mudha*, or deluded; (3) *vikshipta*, or scattered but occasionally steady; (4) *ekagra*, or one-pointed; and (5) *niruddha*, or restrained. Of these five types of mind, only the last two are fit for the practice of meditation. Thus, if progress depends upon practice, then practice depends upon *samvega*. With *samvega* as the chief consideration, aspirants have been classified into categories of mild, medium, and intense. Each of these three main categories is again subdivided into three, making nine categories all together: mildly mild, medium mild, and intensely mild; mildly medium, medium medium, and intensely medium; mildly intense, medium intense, and intensely intense. Progress in meditation is quick for those who are intensely intense in every respect.

Depending upon their progress in meditation, aspirants are divided into four groups: beginner, struggling soul, adept, and perfect.

The beginner is one who has just set foot on the path. His

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

practice of meditation is formal; his object of meditation exists more in his imagination than as a reality. The struggling soul is one who has been practicing meditation for some time, so that his entire mind has become churned up: contrary desires and tendencies that previously remained submerged in his mind now rise to the surface, and he wrestles with them and tries to conquer them. He often thinks the condition of his mind to be worse than it was before he began practicing meditation. Sometimes he feels enthusiasm in his practice, and at other times he finds his meditation dry and uninteresting. The adept is one who has achieved a great amount of devotedness to his practice. He can invoke concentration of mind at will, regardless of internal or external distractions, and is able to maintain his meditative mood at a steady level. His object of meditation is no longer a reproduction of an external symbol or an imagination, but a living reality. An aspirant is said to be perfect when he is able to maintain his meditative mood continuously and without any effort on his part, and to always remain absorbed in God-consciousness with eyes open or with eyes closed.

How long does it take to reach the state of perfection in meditation? Theoretically speaking, the time involved is not long and is measurable. As explained earlier, the traditions of Yoga and Vedanta maintain that if the mind can be made to flow uninterruptedly toward the same object for twelve seconds, that will make one unit of concentration. If the mind can continue in that concentration for twelve times twelve seconds (or two minutes and twenty-four seconds), that will be considered one unit of meditation. If the mind can continue in that meditation for twelve times two minutes and twenty-four seconds (or twenty-eight minutes and forty-eight seconds), that will be the first stage of *samadhi*. If this *samadhi* can be maintained for twelve times that period (five hours, forty-five minutes, and thirty-six seconds), it will lead to the highest absorption of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. But in practical terms, the situation is different for each individual aspirant.

Degree of Detachment

Meditation is a twofold practice of attaching the mind to the Ideal and simultaneously detaching it from its worldly preoccupations. The former involves concentration; the latter, discrimination. One is

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

not possible without the other. The extent of an aspirant's detachment is an indicator of his progress in concentration and meditation. Mastery over the virtue of detachment has four stages:

1. *Yatamana,* in which the aspirant realizes sense enjoyments to be undesirable and recoils from them
2. *Vyatireka,* in which he is able to see clearly which specific senses are to be subdued
3. *Ekendriya,* in which attachment to internal pleasures is given up and aversion to external pains is removed, and the aspirant's mind concentrates upon the task of removing attachment and aversion to the sense of honor and dishonor
4. *Vasikara,* the stage of detachment in which the mind voluntarily gives up all attachments to pleasures and pains, whether gross or subtle, here or hereafter

At the last stage, the aspirant no longer feels any attraction to or repulsion for such things even should they appear before him. Vyasa, in his commentary on Patanjali's aphorisms, mentions that as the aspirant advances in the path of meditation, he is tempted by invisible beings in high places. According to Patanjali, these are fallen beings who, notwithstanding their considerable progress, have been distracted in the path and remain merged in Nature. They tempt the aspirant in the following words:

> Sir, will you seat yourself here? You might enjoy this pleasure, you might find this maiden attractive. This elixir will banish old age and death. In this chariot you can fly through the air. Over there are trees which grant all wishes. That heavenly stream will give you happiness.... Sir, you are entitled to all these rewards.[12]

Thus tempted, the aspirant is advised to reply as follows:

> I have been baked on the dreadful coals of reincarnation. I have writhed in the darkness of rebirth and death. Now at last I have found the lamp of yoga which dispels the shadows of ignorance. How then can I, who have seen its light, be led astray once more by sensual things?[13]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Stages of One-Pointedness

Achievement of the state known as one-pointedness is another measure of progress in meditation. In describing the distinction between concentration, meditation, and *samadhi,* Swami Vivekananda says:

> Fixing the mind on the lotus of the heart or on the centre in the head is what is called dharana [concentration]. Confined to one spot as the base, certain mental waves arise; these waves, not swallowed up by the other kinds of waves, by degrees become prominent while the latter recede and finally disappear. Next the multiplicity of the original waves gives place to unity and one wave only is left in the mind. This is dhyana, meditation. When no basis is necessary, when the whole of the mind has become one wave, has attained one-formedness, it is called samadhi.[14]

Concentration, when it becomes spontaneous and uninterrupted, takes the form of meditation. In effortful concentration, the flow of the thought-waves *(vrittis)* of similar character is not smooth, because of the obstructions of contrary thoughts. Such flow is likened to the flow of water being poured from one vessel to another. While in the state of meditation, the flow of similar thought waves becomes like the flow of oil when it is poured from one container to another—a flow that is smooth and free from all interruptions and totally bereft of all self-consciousness. Patanjali mentions three stages of concentration: At first, the distracting impressions *(samskaras)* are merely held back but are not altogether obliterated by the impressions of the controlling thoughts, which are just gaining strength. At the next stage, the distracting impressions are completely suppressed by the controlling impressions, which stand out in prominence. At the third stage, there is only one continuous stream of controlling thoughts, succeeding each other in a spontaneous flow.[15]

Stages of Concentration

The stage of concentration is another indicator of progress in meditation. Swami Vidyaranya, the author of *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka,* describes the stages of concentration:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Control of speech, i.e., silence, as is found in cows, horses, etc., is the first stage of that superconscious concentration; mindlessness, as is found in children, idiots, etc., is the second stage; absence of egoity, as is experienced in lassitude, is the third stage; and the absence of the great principle—*mahat tattvam*—as in sleep, is the fourth stage. With this quaternion of stages in view, it has been said thus:

"[One] should attain quietude by degrees [i.e., by stages]" (*Bhagavad Gita* 6.25). In this attainment of tranquillity, intellect set in patience is the means. Infinite patience is required in controlling the great principle, egoity, mind, and senses like speech, etc., which are flowing outward with a tremendous speed, just like a torrent tearing away its banks.

Intellect—buddhi—[here] means discrimination. After examining whether control over the previous stage has been gained or not and if [it is] found gained, then the attempt at the next stage is made. If not gained, then the same should be attempted again—thus one should very carefully take note of the progress in the course....

The organ of speech has a twofold function: ordinary speech and *vaidika* (vedic) speech. The ordinary is in the form of usual conversation, etc., and the vedic is in the form of muttering passages, etc., from the scriptures. Of them, the ordinary speech causes distraction in various ways; therefore the yogi should eschew it even when he is risen from concentration. Hence the *smrti* has it thus:

"Silence, yogic posture, [concentration,] practice of meditation, fortitude, living in solitude, desirelessness and equableness—these seven are [prescribed] for the single-staff-carrying monk" (*Narada Parivrajaka Upanisad* 4.25).

In the concentration of restraint, muttering, etc., should be given up. So this is the first stage—the speech-stage. This stage should be brought under firm control first by effort alone in a matter of days or months or years; afterwards [one] should attempt the second stage—the mental plane. Otherwise [if attempts are made at many stages at a time], failure to conquer the first stage will lead to the col-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

lapse of all yogic stages, even as the many-storeyed house collapses at the breakdown of the first storey. Though the eye, etc., are also to be controlled, but they should be understood to have been included in the speech-stage or mind-stage.[16]

Depths of Absorption

Concentration, when it becomes effortless, takes the form of meditation; meditation is absorption in the object meditated upon. Just as concentration has various levels, so does absorption in meditation have various depths by which the aspirant's progress can be measured. The Yoga system describes these depths of absorption in meditation as the following seven stages of *samadhi:*[17]

1. *savitarka* (with question)
2. *nirvitarka* (without question)
3. *savichara* (with discrimination)
4. *nirvichara* (without discrimination)
5. *sananda* (with bliss)
6. *asmita* (with only purified I-consciousness)
7. *samadhi* (the state of complete absorption)

The Yoga system is based upon the idea that the inner Self, which is Pure Consciousness, remains covered by successive layers of ignorance consisting of attachments and aversions. These layers surround the Self like the rings of a tree trunk, with each outer layer being grosser and denser than the preceding inner one. The outermost layer is the physical form. Mind and matter, according to Yoga, are not two separate entities. Matter is the evolved form of mind; in their undifferentiated state, both mind and matter, which are one and the same, are called Prakriti.

The goal of meditation is to transcend the bounds of Prakriti by means of the devolution of consciousness (the opposite of the process of evolution) through meditation. This meditation must be on a single object, beginning with the gross form of the object and proceeding to finer and finer contents of the same object. The three factors in meditation—the witness consciousness of the aspirant, the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

object witnessed, and the act of witnessing—are distinguishable only in the early stages of meditation. As meditation deepens, they begin to merge and finally become one.

The Yoga system maintains that there are only three possible objects of meditation: material form or symbol, a thought or idea, or the inner Self. At the first stage of meditation, *savitarka* (with question), the aspirant concentrates his mind on some visual or audible form or symbol. The object of concentration is thought to exist inside the aspirant and regarded as being within the limits of time and space. It is as if the aspirant's mind at this stage queries the object of concentration to reveal its true nature, which is why this stage is called "with question." The second stage of meditation, *nirvitarka* (without question), is reached when the aspirant is able to concentrate on the same object by separating it from all ideas of time and space.

The aspirant reaches the third stage, *savichara* (with discrimination), when he meditates no longer on the gross form of the object but on its subtle essence *(tanmatra)*, though still thinking of it as within time and space. As his meditation deepens, he attains to the fourth stage, *nirvichara* (without discrimination), where he is able to concentrate solely on the subtle essence of the object, separating it from the ideas of time and space.

His meditation reaches the fifth stage of absorption, *sananda* (with bliss), when he meditates on neither the gross form nor the subtle essence of the object but on its further subtle essence—the very mind-stuff itself. Reaching the sixth stage, *asmita* (with only purified I-consciousness), the aspirant meditates on his I-consciousness in its most undifferentiated form. At this stage, he becomes *videha,* bereft of all body consciousness. Yet this state of disembodiedness is still not perfect, for the aspirant continues to think of himself as having a subtle body.

Absorption according to the Yoga system reaches its culmination when the aspirant's mind becomes free from all seeds of potential thought: his mind now ceases to be mind. The whole universe drops away, time stands still, and his individual consciousness merges in the Self, the universal Consciousness. The process of meditation deliberately cultivates a single thought-wave, and as this thought-wave becomes intensified through repeated practice, it takes

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the form of the whole mind. After swallowing all other distracting thought-waves, it itself becomes quelled.

In the Vedanta system, as discussed earlier (chapter 6: "Meditation in Vedanta"), meditation can be dualistic, nondualistic, or qualified nondualistic in nature. It can be formless or with form, direct or indirect, subjective or objective. Absorption in any of these meditations is generally measured in terms of the following: degree of transcendence of the awareness of one's own body, of the environment and of the passage of time; experience of spiritual emotions and bliss; *savikalpa samadhi,* in which state I-consciousness faintly persists; and *nirvikalpa samadhi,* in which state the meditator, the act of meditation, and the object of meditation become one.

One Vedanta text mentions four stages of absorption in meditation and describes them by the following four analogies. First is the absolute control of speech. Silence is natural to the yogi in the same way as it is natural to the cow. The cow, after it has eaten its fill, is silent, chewing its cud. So also is the contented aspirant silent, thinking about God. The second stage is a lack of self-consciousness similar to that of a baby or an inert object. The third stage is the absence of I-consciousness, exemplified by a person in a state of drowsiness. The fourth stage has been compared to the state of deep sleep: neither awake nor dreaming, the aspirant at this stage is the witness of both states, being totally detached from them.

Experience of *Kumbhaka,* or Suspension of Breath

The experience of *kumbhaka* is the precursor of the meditative stage. The different depths of absorption in meditation correspond to the different degrees of *kumbhaka* attained by the aspirant. As the mind becomes concentrated, the vibration of the vital energy in us temporarily stops functioning. How long it stops varies according to the depth of concentration and absorption. The stoppage may last for a few seconds, or a few minutes, or a few hours. In the state of *samadhi,* it continues for hours.

The experience of *kumbhaka* also indicates the rising of the mind to the upper centers of consciousness. The Yoga system claims that the restlessness of the mind manifests itself in the restlessness of a person's breath. Breathing becomes heavy, with one breath quickly

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

succeeding another, and uneven. Through proper and methodical practice, the breath can be controlled and made so light that a thin piece of cotton placed under the nostrils will not move at all. If the breath can be made light, slow, and even through the practice of *pranayama*, then the mind becomes controlled and concentrated. Ordinarily, breathing is a continuous process of inhalation followed by exhalation, with no gap between the former and the latter. *Pranayama*—one of the eight limbs of the Yoga system *(yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana,* and *samadhi)*—is the practice of checking and separating inhalation from exhalation by a period of suspension. Thus, as discussed earlier, retention of breath is known as *kumbhaka*, while inhalation and exhalation are known respectively as *puraka* and *rechaka*.

The practice of *pranayama* becomes spiritually effective only when the motivation for such practice is spiritual. Retention of breath is an external sign of inner tranquillity. There are persons who are adept in retaining their breath for a long time, but such capacity does not endow them with success in meditation. Spiritual motivation, therefore, is very vital in the practice of meditation and in making progress in it.

Shankaracharya's Fifteen Steps toward Meditation

Shankaracharya emphasizes the need of spiritual motivation. He writes:

> Now, for the attainment of the aforesaid (knowledge), I shall expound the fifteen steps by the help of which one should practise profound meditation at all times.
>
> The Atman that is absolute existence and knowledge cannot be realized without constant practice. So one seeking after knowledge should long meditate upon Brahman for the attainment of the desired goal.
>
> The steps, in order, are described as follows: the control of the senses, the control of the mind, renunciation, silence, space, time, posture, the restraining root *(mulabandha)*, the equipoise of the body, the firmness of vision, the control of the vital forces, the withdrawal of the mind, concentration, self-contemplation, and complete absorption.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The restraint of all the senses by means of such knowledge as "All this is Brahman" is rightly called yama, which should be practised again and again.

The continuous flow of only one kind of thought [relating to the unity of the individual self with Brahman], to the exclusion of all other thoughts, is called niyama, which is verily the supreme bliss and is regularly practised by the wise.

The abandonment of the illusory universe by realizing it as the all-conscious Atman is the real renunciation honoured by the great, since it is of the nature of immediate liberation. [Some explain renunciation as the giving-up of all kinds of actions, whether scriptural or mundane, and thus attaining to a state of inactivity. This, however, is far from what is really meant by renunciation, which, in its deepest sense, is all positive. It is when one realizes Atman everywhere and thus covets nothing that one is said to have real renunciation. The Sruti also declares, "Clothe everything in this transitory world with God and thus maintain thyself by that renunciation," etc. (*Isa Upanishad*, 1)]

The wise should always be one with that silence [the Atman] wherefrom words together with the mind turn back without reaching it, but which is attainable by the yogins.

Who can describe That (i.e., Brahman) whence words turn away? (So silence is inevitable while describing Brahman.) Or if the phenomenal world were to be described, even that is beyond words [because it cannot be called either existent or nonexistent]. This [inexpressibility], to give an alternate definition, may also be termed silence, known among the sages as congenital [inseparable from Atman]. The observance of silence by restraining speech, on the other hand, is ordained by the teachers of Brahman for the ignorant.

That solitude [Brahman is indicated] is known as space, wherein the universe does not exist in the beginning, end or middle, but whereby it is pervaded at all times.

The non-dual (Brahman) that is bliss indivisible is denoted by the word "time," since it brings into existence,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

in the twinkling of an eye, all beings from Brahma downwards.

One should know that to be real posture in which the meditation of Brahman flows spontaneously and unceasingly, and not any other that destroys one's happiness [posture that is painful and drags down the mind].

That which is well known and the origin of all beings and the support of the whole universe, which is immutable and in which the enlightened are completed merged—that alone is known as siddhasana [the eternal Brahman].

That (Brahman) which is the root of all existence and on which the restraint of the mind is based is called the restraining root *(mulabandha)*, which should always be adopted since it is fit for raja-yogins [who practice meditation].

Absorption in the uniform Brahman should be known as the equipoise of the limbs *(dehasamya)*. Otherwise mere straightening of the body like that of a dried-up tree is no equipoise.

Converting the ordinary vision into one of knowledge, one should view the world as Brahman Itself. That is the noblest vision, and not that which is directed to the tip of the nose.

Or, one should direct one's vision to That [Brahman] alone where all distinction of the seer, sight and the seen ceases and not to the tip of the nose.

The restraint of all modifications of the mind by regarding all mental states like the chitta [mind-stuff] as Brahman alone, is called pranayama.

The negation of the phenomenal world is known as rechaka (breathing out), the thought, "I am verily Brahman," is called puraka (breathing in), and the steadiness of that thought thereafter is called kumbhaka (restraining the breath). This is the real course of pranayama for the enlightened, whereas the ignorant only torture the nose. [Patanjali describes pranayama as "controlling the motion of the exhalation and inhalation" (2.49). There are three steps in it. The first step is to draw in the breath *(puraka)*, the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

next is to hold it for some time in the lungs *(kumbhaka)*, and the last is to throw it out *(rechaka)*. Patanjali holds that the mind will be naturally controlled if its communications with the external world are cut off by restraining the breath. But Shankaracharya here maintains that the breath is entirely dependent on the mind and not vice versa; so that instead of frittering away one's energy in the attempt of restraining the breath, one should always try to control the mind. When this is accomplished, the restraint of the breath will follow as a matter of course.]

The absorption of the mind in the Supreme Consciousness by realizing Atman in all objects is known as pratyahara (withdrawal of the mind), which should be practised by the seekers after liberation.

The steadiness of the mind through realization of Brahman wherever the mind goes is known as the supreme dharana (concentration). ["Dharana," says Patanjali, "is holding the mind on to some particular object" (3.1). But when the mind is fully concentrated on every object it comes in contact with, realizing it as Brahman and discarding the names and forms that have been superimposed on it by ignorance, then alone is one said to have reached the culmination of *dharana*.]

Remaining independent of everything as a result of the unassailable thought "I am verily Brahman" is well known by the word *dhyana* (meditation) and is productive of supreme bliss. ["An unbroken flow of thought in some particular object is *dhyana*" (Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 3.2). But it is perfected only when one merges all thought in Brahman, realizing It to be one's own self.]

The complete forgetfulness of all thought by first making it changeless and then identifying it with Brahman is called samadhi, known also as knowledge.[18]

Sri Ramakrishna says in this regard:

When the mind is quiet the prana stops functioning. Then one gets kumbhaka. One may have the same kumbhaka through bhakti yoga as well: the prana stops functioning

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

through love of God too. In the kirtan the musician sings, "Nitai amar mata hati!" [My Nitai dances like a mad elephant!] Repeating this, he goes into a spiritual mood and cannot sing the whole sentence. He simply sings, "Hati! Hati!" When the mood deepens he sings only, "Ha! Ha!" Thus his prana stops through ecstasy, and kumbhaka follows.... If a man is able to weep for God, he will see Him. He will go into samadhi. Perfection in yoga is samadhi. A man achieves kumbhaka without any yogic exercise if he but weeps for God. The next stage is samadhi.[19]

Depths of Dispassion

Another subjective sign of progress in meditation is the depth of dispassion the aspirant has toward the world and worldly enjoyments. The degree of passion for Truth is directly proportionate to the degree of dispassion for anything that stands in the way of realizing Truth.

Shankaracharya in his *Vivekachudamani* describes the meaning and the necessity of dispassion:

> The shark of hankering catches by the throat those seekers of liberation who got only an apparent dispassion (vairagya) and are trying to cross the ocean of Samsara (relative existence), and violently snatching them away, drowns them half-way.
>
> He who has killed the shark known as sense-objects with the sword of mature dispassion crosses the ocean of Samsara, free from all obstacles....
>
> Whoever seeks to realise the Self by devoting himself to the nourishment of the body proceeds to cross a river by catching hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log....
>
> The first steps to yoga are control of speech, non-receiving of gifts, entertaining of no expectations, freedom from activity, and always living in a retired place.
>
> Living in a retired place serves to control the sense-organs, control of the senses helps to control the mind, through control of the mind egoism is destroyed; and this

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

again gives the yogin an unbroken realization of the Bliss of Brahman. Therefore the man of reflection should always strive only to control the mind.

Restrain speech [implies all the sense-organs] in the manas, and restrain manas in the buddhi, and merging that also in the Infinite Absolute Self, attain to supreme Peace.

The body, pranas, organs, manas, buddhi, and the rest—with whichsoever of these supervening adjuncts the mind is associated, the yogin is transformed, as it were, into that....

It is the man of dispassion (vairagya) who is fit for this internal as well as external renunciation; for the dispassionate man, out of the desire to be free, relinquishes both internal and external punishment.

It is only the dispassionate man who, being thoroughly grounded in Brahman, can give up the external attachment to the sense-objects and the internal attachment for egoism, etc.

Know, O wise man, dispassion and discrimination to be like the two wings of a bird in the case of an aspirant. Unless both are there, none can, with the help of either one, reach the creeper of liberation that grows, as it were, on the top of an edifice.

The extremely dispassionate man alone has samadhi, and the man of samadhi alone gets steady realization; the man who has realized the Truth is alone free from bondage, and only the free soul experiences eternal Bliss.

For the man of self-control I do not find any better instrument of happiness than dispassion, and if that is coupled with a highly pure realization of the Self, it conduces to the suzerainty of absolute Independence; and since this is the gateway to the damsel of everlasting liberation, therefore for thy welfare, be dispassionate both internally and externally, and always fix thy mind on the eternal Self....

The result of dispassion is knowledge, that of knowledge is withdrawal from sense-pleasures, which leads to the experience of the Bliss of the Self, whence follows Peace.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

If there is an absence of the succeeding stages, the preceding ones are futile. (When the series is perfect) the cessation of the objective world, extreme satisfaction, and matchless bliss follow as a matter of course.

Being unruffled by earthly troubles is the result in question of knowledge. How can a man who did various loathsome deeds during the state of delusion, commit the same afterwards, possessed of discrimination?

The result of knowledge should be the turning away from unreal things, while attachment to these is the result of ignorance. This is observed in the case of one who knows a mirage and things of that sort, and one who does not. Otherwise, what other tangible result do the knowers of Brahman obtain?...

When the sense-objects excite no more desire, then is the culmination of dispassion. The extreme perfection of knowledge is the absence of any impulsion of the egoistic idea. And the limit of self-withdrawal is reached when the mind-functions that have been merged, appear no more.[20]

Regarding dispassion, the poet-saint Bhartrihari writes the following:

In enjoyment there is the fear of disease; in social position, the fear of falling-off; in wealth, the fear of (hostile) kings; in honour, the fear of humiliation; in power, the fear of foemen; in beauty, the fear of old age; in scriptural erudition, the fear of opponents; in virtue, the fear of traducers; in the body, the fear of death. All the things of this world pertaining to man are attended with fear; renunciation alone stands for fearlessness.[21]

The traditions of Vedanta mention seven depths of dispassion. The first is called *subhechha* (auspicious inclination), in which the aspirant develops a longing for holy company and a desire for Self-Knowledge. The second is known as *vicharana* (discrimination): by attaining this, the aspirant's desire for Self-Knowledge becomes active, and he makes tangible spiritual efforts to

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

purify his mind through the practices of meditation and self-control. The third depth is called *tanumanasa* (attenuation of desire); at this stage the aspirant's aversion toward worldly enjoyments becomes strong, and consequently his practices of meditation and self-control become steady. The fourth is called *sattapatti* (perception of the being): by attaining this depth, the aspirant is able to maintain a steady meditative mood. The potencies of contrary thoughts having faded to a considerable extent, he gets glimpses of his goal and a sense of placid tranquillity pervades his mind. The fifth is called *asamsakti* (freedom from attachment): by attaining this depth, the aspirant is no longer overcome by gross sense desires or even by memories and thoughts of them, and as a result he experiences a taste of inner joy. The sixth depth is called *padarthabhavini* (meditation on the Real), which endows the aspirant with an intense one-pointed devotion to his object of meditation. Being free from all the pulls, gross or subtle, of contrary thoughts, the aspirant's mind now naturally gravitates toward the goal of his meditation. Oblivious of all multiplicities, he attains a state of deep absorption, from which he can be roused by another person only after long effort. The seventh depth is known as *turyaga* (the transcendental stage), the culminating result of the aspirant's mastery over the preceding six depths. The seventh depth endows the aspirant with such deep inner absorption that he cannot be roused from that state by any means.

The first three depths taken together are designated as "wakeful" because at these depths the aspirant continues to perceive the world and worldly things in a way that one perceives them in the ordinary awakened state. By attaining the fourth depth, the aspirant perceives the world as he would in his dream. At the fifth depth, he attains the state of *nirvikalpa,* but he is yet to become established there. The fifth depth is designated as "dreamless sleep," at which he witnesses both "wakeful" and "dream" conditions. The sixth depth has been compared to deep dreamless sleep. The aspirant who has reached this depth does not feel either ego-consciousness or absence of ego. The experience of the seventh depth is compared to the state of Pure Consciousness or *Turiya,* the fourth, as indicated in the *Mandukya Upanishad.*

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Stages of Realization

As an aspirant makes progress in meditation, he passes through various levels of realization. The Yoga system mentions that the supreme goal of meditation is attained by seven successive stages. The first level is reached when it dawns upon the aspirant that the Truth he is seeking is not outside himself but within. In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

> After long searches here and there, in temples and in churches, on earth and in heaven, at last you come back to your own soul, completing the circle from where you started, and find that He whom you have been seeking all over the world, for whom you have been weeping and praying in churches and in temples, on whom you were looking as the mystery of all mysteries, shrouded in the clouds, is the nearest of the near, is your own Self, the reality of your life, body, and soul.[22]

The second level is that at which the aspirant experiences cessation of pain arising out of attachment and aversion: an all-abiding calmness pervades his entire mind. At the third level, he attains total absorption in the Self. The objective universe disappears completely. By reaching the fourth level, he gains absolute freedom and dwells on the borderland between the absolute and the relative. When he attains the fifth level, he realizes that for him the world and his body and mind have completed their services. When he reaches the sixth level, all his stored-up impressions fall away forever, never to come back again. Finally, at the seventh level, the aspirant reaches the final stage of union with the Self, from which he no longer returns to partial consciousness.

The devotional scriptures of Hinduism mention experiences of certain specific spiritual emotions as indicators of progress in dualistic meditation. Following the path of devotion, an aspirant meditates on a particular aspect of the Personal God as his Chosen Ideal, and he reaches the state of absorption by his intensified love for his Chosen Ideal. The steps leading to the state of absorption are considered practices of preparatory love, while the different depths of meditative absorption are known as different degrees of spontaneous love.

Love begins with one-pointed loyalty *(nishtha)* to the Chosen

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Ideal. An aspirant with this one-pointed loyalty begins to develop a special love and liking for his own object of worship, although he shows love and adoration for other forms of God as well. His love at this stage is formal and ceremonial, and therefore his meditation, too, is mostly a practice of discipline, motivated not so much by the commitment of his heart as by practical considerations of his intellect.

One-pointed loyalty brings in its wake a feeling of loving attachment to the Chosen Ideal, and loving attachment gradually culminates in loving devotion. The sense of practicing discipline with effort is slowly replaced by the feeling of loving service and self-surrender. Devotion makes the object of meditation alive and responsive, and therefore meditation becomes spontaneous. Spontaneity in anything results from the commitment of the heart. The cooperation of the heart represents the support of the unconscious part of our mind for our conscious endeavors. There is always a difference between what we think we want and what we really want. So long as an aspirant's conscious spiritual efforts and practices do not get the support and cooperation of his heart, such practices are never spontaneous.

Loving devotion leads to the stage of *bhava*. Reaching this stage, an aspirant feels the inebriation of the meditative mood. This naturally generates continual bubbles of thought within the aspirant reminiscent of his Chosen Ideal.

The stage of *bhava* reaches its consummation in the attainment of *mahabhava*, which is divine intoxication, and then in *prema*, or pure love.

Sri Ramakrishna describes the aforesaid stages in the following words:

> Nishtha leads to bhakti; bhakti, when mature, becomes bhava; bhava, when concentrated, becomes mahabhava; and last of all is prema. Prema is like a cord: by prema God is bound to the devotee; He can no longer run away. An ordinary man can at best achieve bhava.[23]

Experience of Spiritual Emotions

An aspirant as he makes progress in his prayer and meditation begins to experience varieties of spiritual emotions. The traditions of devotion describe these as eight in number:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

1. stupor
2. perspiration
3. horripilation
4. choking of voice
5. trembling
6. paleness of complexion
7. tears
8. loss of consciousness

Also there are four stages of manifestation of these eight emotions:

1. smoldering
2. glowing
3. flaming
4. blazing

Smoldering is that stage when the aspirant experiences one or two of the emotions but is able to suppress them. At the glowing stage, he experiences two or three of the emotions at the same time, and he can check them, but with much difficulty. At the flaming stage, he experiences four or five of the emotions simultaneously with intensity, and he cannot check them anymore. The blazing stage is the supreme state, when five or six or more spiritual emotions manifest themselves simultaneously in the aspirant and reach their maximum intensity, and as a result he loses all body-consciousness.

Absorption in God-consciousness following the path of devotion is gradual and natural. It is a process of gradual inner devolution of speech into thought, thought into concentrated thought, concentrated thought into the silence of absorption, or, as Sri Ramakrishna described as quoted earlier: "The *sandhya* merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in *samadhi.*" Formal worship merges in concentrated prayer, concentrated prayer in chanting of the sacred word Om, and chanting of Om in the silence of *samadhi.* Sri Ramakrishna says: "When hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the *sandhya* anymore. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves."[24]

Psychic Powers and Attainments

Psychic powers of different varieties and magnitudes come to an aspirant who has made considerable progress in the path of meditation. These powers are clairvoyance, or the power of seeing what is happening out of sight; clairaudience, or the power of hearing from a long distance; telepathy, or the power of reading the minds of others and sending thoughts to others in silence; knowledge of one's own past lives or of previous cycles of existence; intimate knowledge of the nature of one's own mind; ability to make oneself extraordinarily strong; ability to make oneself light, big, small, or invisible before the eyes of everybody; conquest of hunger and thirst, and so forth.

Such psychic powers are often known as mysterious or miraculous powers. One finds mention of them in the scriptures of various religious traditions. Many saints, seers, and mystics are known to have attained these powers and exercised them. What is the nature of these powers? Are they real or mere myths and legends? Might they be exaggerated or fabricated descriptions of the greatness of these masters by their respective followers? Although such exaggerations are not uncommon, the phenomena of psychic powers nonetheless exist. In modern times, examples can be found in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to show that psychic powers are not mere legend. Swami Saradananda, the author of *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, mentions many supernatural and psychic powers of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna's Vedantic teacher, Tota Puri, had the power of seeing beings not visible to the human eye. Once during the dead of night, while he was meditating in the Panchavati of the Dakshineswar Temple Garden, he met with a spirit. Tota, fearless as he was, invited the spirit to join him in meditation. The spirit burst into laughter and disappeared. Swami Saradananda further describes the miraculous powers of two spiritual personalities, Girija and Chandra, who came to the Master and who had acquired these powers through their austere spiritual practices. Girija had the power to throw a beam of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

bright light from his back, while Chandra could make himself invisible before human eyes.

Swami Vivekananda also attained many psychic powers as a result of his perfection in meditation. On one occasion he himself verified their authenticity. The incident, as recorded by Swami Saradananda, is as follows:

> The Master used to say that he [Swami Vivekananda] had "attained perfection in meditation." While he was meditating one day, there suddenly came on him clairvoyance and clairaudience, i.e., the power of seeing and hearing from a distance. As soon as he sat down to meditate and the meditation became just a little deep, his mind ascended to a plane from where he could see persons and hear their talk. No sooner had he seen anything like that than there arose a desire in his mind to go and see whether the vision was true or not. And he gave up his meditation immediately, went to those places and found that whatever he had seen during his meditation was entirely true. When he told the Master about it a few days after the occurrence, the latter said, "All these are obstacles on the path to the realization of God. Don't meditate for a few days now."[25]

The Samkhya and Yoga systems both point out that the phenomena of psychic powers are not anything supernatural. These powers are the result of a pure and concentrated mind, which is always powerful. Such a powerful mind can exert influence over weaker minds, since mind and matter are made of the same stuff and matter is the gross form of mind. Our body is nothing but solidified mind. The world of material objects that we perceive through our senses is really the projection of our mind.

Different individual minds are simply individualized forms of the one Universal Mind, which is the sum total of all minds. The more the mind is individualized, the more it becomes conditioned by time, space, and causation. Conversely, the more it is free from individuation and the more it expands through meditation, as an aspirant reaches higher and subtler levels of consciousness, the more the individual mind gradually loses itself in the expansiveness of the Cosmic or Universal Mind, thus gaining access to all minds. In other

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

words, as an individual begins to transcend the lower and grosser forms of existence through meditation, he concurrently acquires a higher and greater form and finally becomes one with the all-pervading Supreme Consciousness, the Paramatman, the very Ground of all existence.

Experiences of psychic powers in various degrees serve as milestones of progress for an aspirant on the path of meditation, giving him self-confidence, encouragement, and inspiration. He must have some such experiences to assure himself that he is on the right path and making progress. Even from an everyday point of view, psychic powers are no mystery. Every individual is endowed with them to a greater or lesser extent. When these powers are exercised by someone in pursuit of worldly fulfillment, he attains worldly success. But when, through self-control and concentration, he is instead able to direct these powers toward the internal world, he gains mastery over the inner forces. Often the powers of a hypnotist, a magician, or a faith healer appear to be psychic or supernatural, although they are known to be the result of the repeated practice of concentration. Many discoveries of science appeared to be impossible and unbelievable or miraculous until they were understood. Psychic powers, too, may seem supernatural to many, but they are natural for those who are established in purity, self-control, and concentration of mind.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

29. *Mystical Experiences and Realizations*

Spiritual experiences and realizations by themselves do not always give an accurate measure of an aspirant's progress in meditation. Not all experiences and realizations are authentic, nor do all necessarily indicate progress. These experiences and realizations must pass the test of critical evaluation in order to be taken as the milestones of progress. This critical evaluation is necessary for two reasons: first, for the reason stated above, that not all experiences and realizations indicate progress, and second, because misgivings and feelings of frustration often sway our mind.

Many mystical experiences are often merely the results of pious hopes or figments of the imagination stirred up through meditation. The mind can and does play tricks on the aspirant. Such inner experiences or revelations may simply be subjective wish fulfillments or projections of the mind. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes is quite justified when he says that for a person to say God has spoken to him in a dream is no more than to say he dreamed God spoke to him. Many people considered religious have clung fervently to a belief in demons and demigods that exist only in their imaginations. They piously believe they have heard commands and as a consequence have made bloody sacrifices, burned themselves to death, or fought fanatic wars, considering such practices to be holy.

Under such circumstances, our only real resource is critical reason and rational investigation. The philosopher Bradley once said in a jesting mood that metaphysics is finding bad reasons for what

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

we believe by instinct—in other words, our so-called convictions still have to be vindicated by reason. This is the only process that can lend certainty to what we believe. It is true that reason has its limitations and is never an adequate instrument for the realization of the transcendental Truth. But in earlier stages of our search, reason is the only trustworthy tool we have.

Any authentic spiritual experience must be in accord with the scriptures and should not contradict reason. Scriptures describe the nature of the experiences and realizations of those who have walked in this path and reached the goal. Reason seeks to evaluate these spiritual realizations by separating them from the idle fancies and imaginings of the mind. Vedanta in particular holds that a genuine spiritual experience or realization is always repeatable *(avadita)*, never contradicts human reasoning *(aviruddha)*, and is always conducive to the happiness and welfare of all beings *(sarva bhute hiteratah)*.

Possible objections to taking mystical experiences and realizations as sure signs of progress in meditation are the following: self-delusion, self-deception, hallucinations and dreams, psychic attainments, spiritual emotions, borrowed and temporary experiences, experiences stimulated by external circumstances, and experiences that one has stumbled into by accident.

Self-Delusion

Spiritual experiences and realizations are always personal, private, and internal, and therefore by their very nature they defy objective verification and critical evaluation. Thus there is great danger of self-delusion, fabrication, wrong thinking, and exaggeration. Unless the aspirant is discerning and discriminating, he may magnify a passing spiritual emotion into a revelation of great spiritual significance, or he may twist an incident that might be the result of coincidence into an important spiritual message. There is a story of an aspirant claiming that when he sat for meditation he would become so absorbed that he would hear within himself the uninterrupted sound of Om *(anahata dhavani)*. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the sound he used to hear was not the uninterrupted sound within but the steady humming of a nearby refrigerator.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Self-Deception

An aspirant's experiences and realizations can also be self-induced or imaginary. Personal tragedy, failure to achieve a long-cherished goal, disappointment, or a depressed state of mind—any of these can lead one to experience temporary spiritual fervor and emotions and even to have psychic visions. Tears of remorse may pass for tears of devotion; hope, fear, or an intense desire to achieve something can make a person experience deceptive spiritual phenomena. Most of these experiences are compensatory self-fulfillments and do not indicate any spiritual advancement.

Hallucinations and Dreams

Some experiences and realizations may not be authentic experiences at all. They may be mere hallucinations and dreams. A weak-minded person is susceptible to hallucinations and dreams, and is likely to consider them spiritual visions and experiences. A person suffering from nervous disorder or from a repressed state of mind often uses his dreams to gain self-satisfaction.

In general, dream images are created from repressed desires. Dreams expressing an individual's true spiritual disposition are comparatively rare. There are three basic theories among psychological schools concerning the root cause of dreams. One school maintains that dreams are externally caused; the second holds that they are internally caused; and the third claims they are due to both external and internal causes. All agree, however, that dreams indicate the dreamer's inner nature. Every individual creates his or her own dreams. The ancient Greeks believed that a person actually leaves his body during the dream state. Other religions have held that dreams are divine messages from above. Vedanta's contention is that a dream is always a dream and is nothing but a dream. A dream, by definition, can never be a reality. Vedanta also holds that nothing leaves the body during the dream state, and that subtle impressions of our past experiences stored up in our mind serve as material for dream images.

There are additional factors that stimulate dreams, including unaccustomed food intake just prior to sleep, the condition of the body, an individual's immediate surroundings and circumstances, heat and cold, change in room temperature, air pressure, oxygen,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

humidity, hard or soft bed, loose- or tight-fitting clothing, digestion of food, and so on. Indigestion is said to be the cause of nightmares. A person sleeping with a heating pad under his feet may dream that he is walking over hot coals or a blazing fire.

Hope, fear, and anxiety are yet other causes of dreams. An individual with an intense desire for wealth may dream to his great joy that he has discovered a buried treasure, or a person fearful of oversleeping may actually dream he has overslept. There are many recorded cases where a person of weakened nerves has experienced delusive psychic phenomena or created dream visions in expectation of self-fulfillment.

Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was once approached by a Western lady who said she was experiencing the presence of an invisible being around her all the time and feeling disturbed. The Swami listened to her sympathetically and in reply gently said that in his opinion her experiences were mere hallucinations caused by her weak mind, and he advised her to make her mind strong through the practice of self-control. Any genuine spiritual experience always carries its own stamp of authenticity; it puts an end to all doubt and fills the heart with an ineffable peace.

Psychic Attainments

Psychic attainments in the form of *siddhis,* or powers, are to be distinguished from spiritual advancement toward Self-Knowledge. Attainment of psychic power does not by itself denote any spiritual advancement. Patanjali says: "The *siddhis,* or powers, are attained through birth, chemical means, the power of words, mortification or concentration."[1] That is to say, psychic powers may be inborn, or they may be acquired through drugs, sacred words, the practice of austerities, or spiritual concentration.

There are individuals born with psychic powers, such as clairvoyance and clairaudience, but these powers are not accidental to them. Patanjali maintains that they had acquired these powers in their previous lives but were not able to enjoy them. Hence, they now enjoy these powers in the present life. In fact, all the moral, intellectual, and spiritual faculties that are special in an individual are inherited from previous lives.

Psychic powers can also be acquired through drugs, but such

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

use of drugs is always followed by strong nervous debility and depression. The traditions of Yoga claim that there existed in ancient times a sect known as the Rasayanas, who used drugs as part of a kind of alchemy by which they could maintain the fitness of their bodies and prolong life. Attainment of the goal of Yoga depends upon the vigorous and enthusiastic practice of various disciplines that require not only intense desire and motivation of the mind but also fitness of the body. Physical ailments or incapacities can impede practice, and death can stop progress altogether, so that the aspirant has to wait for another incarnation to be able to begin his practice again. Therefore, the Rasayanas developed various drugs and other devices to help them overcome these obstacles, increase longevity, and attain the goal in one lifetime. Some of these Rasayanas believed that sulfur and mercury contain hidden properties by which life can be prolonged indefinitely. Members of certain other sects believe that spiritual masters still live after death in their old bodies, helping to guide them along their path. Patanjali does not deny these possibilities.

Psychic powers also can be attained through the repetition of sacred words or mantras. The mantras are believed to have mystical powers lying dormant within them, and when they are chanted properly with due observance, their powers become manifest.

Such powers can moreover be attained by ascetic austerities, by which one gains control of the body and mind: the restlessness of the body is overcome, and concentration is thereby achieved. But such concentration is not necessarily spiritual, for concentration is spiritual only when its motivation is spiritual. However, any practice of concentration, regardless of motive, does generate power. In this context, Swami Vivekananda has stated:

> You will find men holding their hands up all their lives, until their hands wither and die. Men keep standing, day and night, until their feet swell, and if they live, the legs become so stiff in this position that they can no more bend them, but have to stand all their lives. I once saw a man who had kept his hands raised in this way, and I asked him how he felt when he did it first. He said it was awful torture. It was such torture that he had to go to a river and put himself in water, and that allayed the pain for a little while.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

After a month he did not suffer much. Through such practices the powers, or *siddhis,* can be attained.[2]

There is a similar story of an ascetic who for many years practiced the austerity of keeping his right arm raised constantly. As a result, his arm became so stiff that he could no longer bend it. The ascetic, who was proud of his attainment but doubtful of his spiritual destiny, went to visit a holy man. Instead of going directly to see the saint, however, the ascetic sat outside in the courtyard of the house where the holy man was living. He put the following question to the saint by messenger: "What is my spiritual destiny?" As his reply to the ascetic, the saint said to the messenger: "Tell him that his spiritual future is as uncertain as the present state of his arm."

Psychic powers come in a natural way to an aspirant whose practice of concentration is spiritual. They are the results of his gradual spiritual development. Powers attained through drugs and herbs, through repetition of mantras, or through ascetic austerities are always short-lived, and most often those who crave and acquire these powers become prone to their misuse and eventually meet with various sufferings and spiritual ruin. This happens because such persons, notwithstanding their miraculous attainments, are not free from desires. They may have conquered the desire for gross worldly fulfillment but continue to cherish the desire for power, name and fame, heavenly rewards, and so on. All desires, no matter what they are, spring from selfishness.

On the other hand, one who practices spiritual concentration instead attains *samadhi,* which is the fulfillment of all desires. The practice of concentration and meditation never fails to produce these results—control over the mind and, through this, control over external nature. The aspirant is free to claim the results of his spiritual practices as his own and use them for the fulfillment of his ego, or he may forgo his claim entirely. Only those who forgo such claims entirely attain the highest goal—the perfection of Self-Knowledge. Those who claim their rewards get what is their due but miss the Supreme Goal.

Psychic experiences and attainments are usually mixed blessings for an aspirant. Instead of being sources of spiritual inspiration and incentives for his further striving, they very often prove to be

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

great obstacles in his path. It is difficult not to succumb to the lure of psychic powers. Even advanced spiritual souls, notwithstanding their superior self-control and discrimination, have been carried away by their own psychic attainments and eventually have lost everything, including their psychic powers. Psychic powers may appear enchanting, fantastic, and even supernatural to the casual observer, but from the spiritual point of view they are of little value to an aspirant.

Sri Ramakrishna used to relate two stories to his disciples to impress upon their minds the futility of psychic attainments. The first story concerns a monk:

> A man had two sons. Dispassion came on the elder in his youth. He left home as a monk, while the younger got his education and became learned and virtuous. He then married and applied his mind to the performance of the duties of a householder. Now, there is a tradition among monks that if they like, they may go to see the place of their birth once after the expiration of twelve years. The said monk also came thus to see his birthplace. While surveying the land, the cultivation, the wealth and other possessions of his younger brother, he came to his gate, stood and called him by name. On hearing the call, the younger brother came out and saw his elder brother. As he met him after a long time, the younger brother was beside himself with joy. He saluted him, brought him in and, sitting by his side, began to serve him in various ways. The two brothers conversed on various topics after taking their meal. The younger brother then asked the elder, "Brother, you gave up all these worldly pleasures and wandered as a monk for so long a time. Please tell me what you have gained by it?" As soon as the elder brother heard this, he said, "Will you see it? Then come with me." Saying so, he came with his younger brother to the bank of the river in the neighborhood and said, "Just see," and immediately he walked on the waters of the river to the other bank and called out to him, "Have you seen it?" The younger brother paid half a penny to the ferry man, crossed the river by boat, went up

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

to his brother and said, "What have I seen?" The elder brother said, "Why, have you not seen me crossing the river on foot?" The younger brother then laughed and said, "Brother, have you not also seen that I have crossed the river by paying a half penny? But is this all you have got in return for putting up with so much suffering for twelve long years? You have got only what I accomplish so easily for just half a penny." The elder brother was awakened by these words of the younger and applied his mind to the realization of God.[3]

The second story is as follows:

A yogi attained the power of bringing about whatever he mentioned. Whatever he said to anybody came to pass immediately. Even if he said to anybody "die," he died immediately; if he said to him again "live," he came to life at once. One day on a journey that yogi met a devout holy man. The yogi found that he was always repeating the name of God and meditating on Him. He was told that the devotee had been practicing such austerities there for many years. On seeing and after hearing all these things, the egoistic yogi went up to that holy man and said condescendingly, "Well, you have indeed been repeating the name of God for so long a time; tell me if you have gained anything?" The holy man replied humbly, "What do I expect to get? I have no desire of getting anything except realizing Him; and one cannot realize Him without His grace. That is why I have been lying down here and calling on Him, that He may some day have compassion on me, knowing that I am so humble and lowly." The yogi retorted, "If you have not gained anything, then what is the utility of this useless effort? Direct your effort so as to get something!" So advised, the devotee remained silent. But a little later he asked the yogi, "Well, sir, may I hear what you yourself have got?" The yogi said, "Well, do you want to hear? Just see." Thereupon, he said to an elephant tied under a tree close by, "Elephant, die." And the elephant dropped down dead at once. The yogi said proudly, "Do you see? See

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

again." With this, he said to the dead elephant, "Elephant, live." And the elephant came back to life at once, shook the dust off his body, and stood there as before. The yogi now said triumphantly, "Well, have you now seen?" The devotee had kept silent so long; but now he said, "Well, what more have I observed than to see the elephant die and come back to life again? But will you please tell me what you have gained thereby? Have you become free from repeated births and deaths by attaining that power? Have you got deliverance from old age and disease? Or have you realized that indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Itself?" The yogi then remained speechless and was awakened.[4]

In his book *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master,* Swami Saradananda narrates the story of two spiritual personalities, Girija and Chandra, who had attained miraculous powers through spiritual practices and austerities, yet ultimately became victims of these very powers. Swami Saradananda's account of Chandra is as follows:

> The Master told us that Chandra was of a contemplative nature and a lover of God. He attained success in working a miracle with a *gutika* or tiny ball; with the ball sanctified by a *mantra* on his person, he could be beyond the vision of ordinary eyes and could easily have ingress into and egress from even carefully protected, unapproachable places. But the weak human mind becomes egoistic if it acquires such miraculous powers before the realization of God. And it is needless to say that it is the increase of egoism that entangles man in the net of desires, prevents him from going forward towards higher ideals, and at last becomes the cause of his fall.[5]

Explaining further, Swami Saradananda continues:

> Ah, how many and various are the ways in which the Master explained to us over and over again: "It is the increase of egoism that leads to the increase of sin. Conversely, it is the decrease of egoism that leads to the attainment of virtue. The increase of egoism is accompanied with the decrease of virtue and the destruction of egoism

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

results in the realization of God. Selfishness is sin and selflessness is virtue. When the 'I' dies, all troubles are over. Ah!" continued he, "it is egoism only that is called in the scriptures 'the knot of spirit and matter.' Spirit or consciousness means the Self which is of the nature of pure knowledge, and matter means the body, senses, etc. This egoism has tied these two together and has created in the human mind the firm delusion, 'I am *jiva* possessed of the body, senses, etc.' One cannot make any progress if one cannot cut this difficult knot asunder. It has to be given up. Again, Mother has shown me that miraculous powers are to be shunned like faeces. Attention should not be paid to them. They sometimes come spontaneously to one when one applies oneself to spiritual practices; but one who pays attention to them has to stop short there and cannot go forward towards God...."

Egoism grew in Chandra when he attained success in the *mantra*. We were told by the Master that attachment to lust and gold grew gradually in Chandra's mind. He became enamored of the daughter of a respectable well-to-do man and began to frequent his house by means of that miraculous power. Thus on account of the increase in his egoism and selfishness, Chandra lost the power and met with various kinds of humiliation.[6]

The second personality was Girija, who had attained the power of throwing light from his body. About Girija, Swami Saradananda states:

On one occasion he [the Master] went with Girija for a walk to Sambhu Babu's garden and a long time passed in conversation with him. "Devotees," said the Master, "possess a nature like that of hemp-smokers. A hemp-smoker first has a strong pull at the bowl, hands it over to another, and then puffs out the smoke slowly. He does not enjoy the intoxication till he passes the bowl to another. Similarly when devotees come together, one devotee, absorbed in the divine mood, speaks on God and, filled with bliss, becomes silent; he then gives another devotee an opportunity to

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

speak on Him and enjoys the bliss as a listener." As Sambhu Babu, Girija, and the Master came together that day, none of them was conscious of how time flew. It gradually became dusk and the first quarter of the night passed away imperceptibly before the Master realised that they had to return. He bade good night to Sambhu, and came to the road with Girija and began to proceed towards the Kali temple. But it was pitch dark. Unable to see anything of the road, he was slipping at every step and mistaking the direction. That it was dark did not occur to the Master and, being deeply absorbed in divine talk, he forgot to ask Sambhu for a lantern. What was he to do now? He caught hold of Girija's hand and began to somehow feel his way. But he was experiencing great difficulty. Seeing him suffering thus, Girija said, "Wait a little, brother; I will show you light." Saying so, he turned about, stood and illumined the road with a long stream of effulgent light emanating from his back. The Master said, "The whole of the road up to the gate of the Kali temple was very clearly seen in that bright light and I had light all the way I came."

The Master then smiled and immediately added, "But those powers of theirs did not continue long. They disappeared when Chandra and Girija lived for some time in this [my] company." Asked by us for the reason, the Master said, "Mother withdrew their powers into this [his own body] for their good. And when that happened, they gave up all those vain things and their minds went towards God."[7]

Sri Ramakrishna often described occult powers as deluding and considered the craving for such powers to be a sign of low-mindedness:

Only the small-minded seek them [occult powers]. If one asks something of a rich man, one no longer receives any favor from him. The rich man doesn't allow such a person to ride in the same carriage with him. Even if he does, he doesn't allow the man to sit near him. Therefore love without any selfish motive is best.... I tremble with fear lest I should acquire those powers. If I should have them, then

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> this place would be turned into a hospital or a dispensary. People would flock here and ask me to cure their illness. Is it good to have occult powers?... Occult power is sure to beget pride, and pride makes one forget God.... It is very troublesome to possess occult powers. Nangta taught me this by a story. A man who had acquired occult powers was sitting on the seashore when a storm arose. It caused him great discomfort; so he said, "Let the storm stop." His words could not remain unfulfilled. At that moment a ship was going full sail before the wind. When the storm ceased abruptly the ship capsized and sank. The passengers perished and the sin of causing their death fell to the man. And because of that sin he lost his occult powers and went to hell.[8]

Swami Saradananda narrates the story of Pandit Gauri, another spiritual personality who had attained great psychic powers through spiritual austerities. With these powers, he was able to defeat all opponents in any philosophical debate. It is said that whenever the pandit entered the arena of a debate, he would begin to chant loudly certain mystic syllables with great spiritual fervor and heroic sentiment. While chanting, he would slap his left arm with the palm of his right hand, like a wrestler, as a challenge to his opponents. Anyone hearing this powerful chant, which expressed a combative divine mood, would at once be overcome by an indescribable fear and be made to feel powerless. Once, when the pandit came to the Dakshineswar Kali temple to participate in such a debate, he met Sri Ramakrishna. The episode was recorded by Swami Saradananda as follows:

> The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] had not known of that power of Gauri. But, as soon as he entered the Dakshineswar Kali temple and uttered loudly the syllables "ha, re, re, re," someone, as it were, within the Master, pushed him up and made him utter those words more loudly than Gauri. Hearing those syllables from the mouth of the Master, Gauri uttered them still more loudly. Excited at that, the Master uttered "ha, re, re, re" far more loudly than he. The Master used to say smilingly that a terrible noise arose, like the din

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

made during inroads by dacoits, on account of the louder and yet louder utterances of those syllables on both sides. With sticks, cudgels, etc., the gate-keepers of the Kali temple ran from wherever they were, hurriedly, towards the place of the noise. All others were beside themselves with fear. That apart, Gauri could not at last utter those words more loudly than the Master and was silenced and, as if in a somewhat dejected mood, slowly entered the Kali temple. On knowing that the Master and the newly arrived Pandit were raising all that din, all went away roaring with laughter. The Master said: "The divine Mother afterwards told me that the power with which Gauri stole away the powers of others, himself remaining unconquerable, was exposed here and lost to him for ever. Mother attracted that power 'here' (into the Master) for his good." And it was seen that, day by day, Gauri was actually charmed by the ideal of the Master and became completely obedient to him.[9]

Psychic powers are no danger to those who already have attained knowledge of the Self. In that case, psychic powers become adornments, as is symbolized by the snakes around the neck of Shiva in Hindu thought. Traditionally, Shiva is shown as absorbed in meditation, his body smeared with ashes, his neck garlanded with hissing snakes, and a third eye between his other two eyes, emitting fire. Shiva's third eye, the eye of discrimination, emits the fire of dispassion, which burns up all desires of the flesh. The hissing snakes represent the turbulent senses. Shiva has conquered them fully, and so the snakes, instead of biting him, form themselves into a beautiful garland around his neck and thus serve to glorify his self-conquest. The ashes with which Shiva besmears himself stand for his burned-up desires.

Regarding psychic powers, Swami Vivekananda observes:

The powers acquired by the practice of yoga are not obstacles for the yogi who is perfect, but are apt to be so for the beginner, through the wonder and pleasure excited by their exercise. *Siddhis* are the powers which mark success in the practice, and they may be produced by various means, such as the repetition of a *mantra*, yoga disciplines,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

meditation, fasting, or even the use of herbs and drugs. The yogi who has conquered all interest in the powers acquired and who renounces all virtue arising from his actions attains the "cloud of virtue"—the name of one of the states of samadhi—and radiates holiness as a cloud rains water.[10]

An aspirant pursuing the path of meditation must bear in mind that the most powerful impediments keeping him from his goal are lust and greed, which confront him in various disguises at different stages of his progress. Psychic powers, the most subtle of these disguises, have been called the lust of the mind. When the lust of the flesh has been overcome, it reappears as the lust of the mind, manifesting itself as a craving for recognition, honor, adoration, and psychic powers. Lust and greed are most difficult to overcome: through their subtle and disguised promptings, they have deluded even very highly advanced souls and brought about their spiritual ruin.

Sri Ramakrishna loved to sing one of the songs of Ramprasad, the great poet-saint and mystic, in which Ramprasad compares the process of meditation to diving deep into the heart's fathomless depths. The song is as follows:

Taking the name of Kali, dive deep down, O mind,
Into the soul's fathomless sea;
But never believe the bed of the ocean bare of pearls
If in the first few dives you fail.
With firm resolve and self-control
Dive deep and make your way to Mother Kali's realm.

Deep in the sea, O mind, of the Knowledge of Mother Kali
Lie the lustrous pearls of peace;
If you but cherish love and follow the scriptures' rule,
You can possess them for yourself.

But in those silent ocean depths
Six alligators lurk—lust, anger, and the rest
Swimming about in search of prey.
Smear your body well with the turmeric of *viveka;*
The pungent smell of it will shield you from their touch.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Unnumbered precious pearls are strewn on the ocean bed:
Plunge in, says Ramprasad, and gather handfuls there.[11]

The six alligators represent the six passions: lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride, and envy. Ramprasad advises the diver to smear his body with the "turmeric of *viveka*" before entering the turbid waters of the ocean of his soul—that is, to shield himself from the passions with the armor of discrimination and dispassion.

Spiritual Emotions

Experiences of spiritual emotions manifesting such conditions as physical contortions, horripilations, suspension of breath, and even trance states do not of themselves indicate lasting spiritual progress. An aspirant may have these experiences because of overindulgence in spiritual emotions, weak nerves, or an unconscious hankering for spiritual recognition. Aspirants of a predominantly emotional temperament are often found to be easily overcome by the upsurge of spiritual emotions and even to attain states like partial ecstasy. All these experiences, however, are neither natural nor well grounded. Spiritual advancement is to be determined not by what the seeker feels occasionally and temporarily, but by what he *is*, naturally and spontaneously. His increased passion for God-vision must be matched by his decreased longing for worldly objects. Mere experience of spiritual emotions is suspect unless it brings in its wake a transformation of character. Swami Vivekananda cautions spiritual seekers about the mistaken notion of spiritual progress in the following words:

> The effusion of sentiment which is not attended by a corresponding transformation of character and which is not strong enough to destroy the cravings of lust and gold by awakening in the heart an enthusiasm for the vision of God—is neither deep nor of any real value in the realm of spirituality. Physical contortions, tears, horripilations, and even momentary trance which result from this wrong emotion are, in reality, hysterical. These should be controlled by a determined effort. If that fails, one should take a nutritious diet or even consult a doctor. For unconsciously, you are feigning these things. It is only in rare individuals of

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

gigantic spirituality that these emotions, overflowing the walls of restraint and appearing as trance or the shedding of tears, etc., are genuine. But ignorant people do not realize this and think that those outward symptoms of themselves indicate deep spiritual fervor, so instead of practicing restraint, devotion, and renunciation, they studiously cultivate these effusions with the result that their weakened nerves respond in this way to the slightest religious stimulus. If this is allowed to go on unchecked the result is physical and mental disaster. Of one hundred persons who take up the spiritual life eighty turn out to be charlatans and fifteen become insane. Only the remaining five may be blessed with a vision of real truth. Therefore beware.[12]

Borrowed and Temporary Experiences

Spiritual experiences in the form of ecstasies and emotions may be of a borrowed nature. A piece of iron placed near a blazing fire becomes hot because it absorbs heat. In this instance, the hotness of the iron is not its own, but is borrowed, and it dissipates as soon as the iron is taken some distance away from the fire. Likewise, a spiritual aspirant coming into contact with a great spiritual personality may feel a sudden uplift in spiritual emotions, or even experience partial ecstasy, and then mistakenly take these experiences and emotions as marks of his own spiritual advancement. An illustration of this phenomenon can be found in the experiences of the spiritual seekers who used to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever they would come into the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, they would all feel greatly uplifted and filled with spiritual fervor. At those times renunciation, concentration, and God-consciousness seemed to be natural and spontaneous for them, but their spiritual fervor would greatly lose its intensity when they were away from him.

Experiences Stimulated by External Circumstances

Spiritual experiences may be stimulated by external circumstances. An aspirant may suddenly be lifted to a high spiritual plane while participating in religious music involving group singing, dancing, or chanting, but such experiences, although not altogether false, most

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

often prove to be short-lived. Unless an aspirant is well grounded in dispassion and renunciation, the sudden rise of his mind is usually followed by a sudden fall. Swami Saradananda describes such an incident:

> One day a few Vaishnava devotees came with an absent-minded young man. We had never seen them before. The reason why they came was that they wanted to show the young man to the Master and know the Master's opinion about the strange spiritual state that had suddenly come upon him. Word was sent to the Master and he saw the young man. The face and chest of the young man were red; and he was seen taking the dust of the feet of all with humility. As he was repeating God's names he was having frequent tremors and horripilations and both his eyes were reddish and a little swollen owing to an incessant flow of tears. He was of dark-blue complexion, was neither fat nor thin, and had a tuft of hair on his head. His face and limbs were graceful and well-built. He was wearing a white cloth without borders which was not very clean and had, we remember, neither wrapper nor shoes. He seemed quite indifferent to the cleanliness or preservation of his body. We were told the high-strung state had come on him suddenly when one day he was singing the praises of Lord Hari. Since then he had been taking virtually no food and having no sleep; he would weep day and night and roll on the ground because God had not been realized. He had been in that state for the last few days. The moment the Master saw the young man he said, "Ah! it is, I find, the commencement of the *madhurabhava* (spiritual mood of regarding oneself as the sweetheart of God). But this state will not last; he cannot retain it. It is very difficult to retain this state. As soon as a woman is touched lustfully this spiritual mood will vanish." Be that as it may, the Vaishnava devotees accompanying the young man returned home with him. They felt a little consoled at the Master's words that at least the young man's brain was not deranged. However, a little afterwards news reached us that the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> Master's prediction was perfectly fulfilled; the young man had been overcome by the fateful calamity. He had ascended fortunately to a very high plane indeed owing to the momentary excitement of *sankirtan,* but alas he came down to a very low plane owing to his mind's reaction to the experience.[13]

There is always the danger of a reaction to spiritual experiences that are not spontaneous but stimulated by external circumstances. The reaction is usually an abrupt fall of the mind from the high spiritual plane to its lowest depths. A mind that is not yet purified by the practice of dispassion and renunciation is likely to fall since it does not have the necessary purity to retain spiritual fervor, ecstasy, or absorption. Swami Vivekananda has given us the following warning:

> The vehement stirring up of feeling and that dancing of the Vaishnavas are good and very catching no doubt; but there is also a danger in practicing them, from which you must save yourself. The danger lies here—in the reaction. On the one hand, the feelings are at once roused to the highest pitch, tears flow from the eyes, the head reels as if it were under intoxication—on the other hand, as soon as the *sankirtan* stops, that mass of feeling sinks down as precipitately as it rose. The higher the wave rises on the ocean, the lower it falls, with equal force. It is very difficult at that stage to contain oneself against the shock of reaction; unless one has proper discrimination, one is likely to succumb to the lower propensities of lust, etc. I have noticed the same thing in America also. Many would go to church, pray with much devotion, sing with great feeling, and even burst into tears when hearing the sermons; but after coming out of church, they would have a great reaction and succumb to carnal tendencies.[14]

The practice of concentration and meditation is not beneficial, nor even desirable, unless it is preceded by the practice of dispassion and renunciation. An impure mind, when concentrated, can prove to be a veritable demon, impossible to restrain and control.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Experiences Stumbled Into

One may stumble into spiritual experiences—that is, these experiences may come to an aspirant before he is physically and mentally prepared to receive them. There are instances of saints who manifested great spiritual wisdom side by side with superstition and narrow-mindedness, or of spiritual personalities who exhibited great love and compassion for their own followers yet showed cruelty and hatred to others. Swami Vivekananda's words in this context are as follows:

> The yogi says that there is a great danger in stumbling upon this state. In a good many cases there is the danger of the brain's being deranged; and as a rule you will find that all those men, however great they were, who stumbled upon this superconscious state without understanding it groped in the dark and generally had, along with their knowledge, some quaint superstitions. They opened themselves to hallucinations.[15]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

30. The Transformation of Character

The most certain sign of progress in meditation is the transformation of character. Just as a tree is known by its fruits, an aspirant advancing along the path of meditation is known by his conduct and behavior. There may be some question about an aspirant's inner attainments, which are private, mystical, and individual, but there can be no doubt about the transformation of his character.

What a person is within is manifested in conduct and behavior, actions and reactions. An aspirant's conduct and behavior in everyday life indicate his contemplative attainments. The inner enlightenment achieved through meditation should not and cannot be merely an idea or mystical revelation. Enlightenment, in order to become a reality, must illumine every facet of daily life: a mere glimpse of Truth is not enough. The seeker must be established in such Truth permanently, so that he is able to commune with It constantly and spontaneously. To borrow the words of the Protestant mystic Jakob Boehme, the seeker must reach "the country which is no mere vision but a home." In his progress toward self-realization, the goal of meditation, the seeker must pass from time to eternity, from the bounds of ego-consciousness to the limitless expanse of cosmic consciousness. This expansion of consciousness is evidenced by transformation of character.

Through the practice of meditation, an aspirant is reborn and simultaneously dies to his old self. As he practices, he gradually begins to develop a new mind, new nerves, new perspectives, new visions, and new *samskaras* (thought potencies), leaving behind his

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

old life with its old thoughts, old ties, old aspirations and identifications. Transformation of character is the measure of this spiritual rebirth and growth. The transforming effect of meditation is liberation, and the meaning of liberation is freedom: not freedom *from* anything, but freedom in the midst of everything. The world remains the same as before, but the aspirant becomes changed and transformed.

Meditation culminates in *samadhi*. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of *samadhi: savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa*. In *savikalpa samadhi* the mind takes the form of the object of meditation and rests on it but at the same time maintains a distinction of knower, knowledge, and the object of knowledge. In *nirvikalpa samadhi* the mind becomes one with the object of meditation, and the distinction of knower, knowledge, and the object of knowledge is lost altogether.

What should be the test of this experience of *samadhi*? Could the state of *samadhi* be just that of dreamless sleep, since in dreamless sleep the mind is also not felt? Vedanta contends that the most crucial test of the experience of genuine *samadhi* is that the experiencer comes back to normal consciousness with his character totally transformed. The experience of *samadhi* never leaves him: a part of it remains with him all the time, and he lives under its spell. It is said that even if a fool were to experience *samadhi* by chance, he would be transformed into a sage.

In dreamless sleep, on the other hand, the mind does not undergo any transformation; it only ceases to function, being merged in its cause—ignorance. It is for this reason that no transformation of character is possible in dreamless sleep. After the experience of dreamless sleep, a thief continues to be a thief and a fool continues to be a fool, both manifesting their former character patterns. Dreamless sleep is marked by a lack of consciousness, while *samadhi* is a state of superconsciousness.

The following story told by Sri Ramakrishna illustrates the difference between the conscious experience of genuine *samadhi* and involuntary or accidental experience of the unconscious state:

> A magician was showing his tricks before a king. Now and then he exclaimed: "Come confusion! Come delusion! O

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> King, give me money! Give me clothes." Suddenly his tongue turned upward and clove to the roof of his mouth. He experienced kumbhaka [retention of breath]. He could utter neither word nor sound, and became motionless. People thought he was dead. They built a vault of bricks and buried him there in that posture. After a thousand years someone dug into the vault. Inside it people found a man seated in samadhi. They took him for a holy man and worshipped him. When they shook him his tongue was loosened and regained its normal position. The magician became conscious of the outer world and cried, as he had a thousand years before: "Come confusion! Come delusion! O King, give me money! Give me clothes."[1]

The message of the story is that only the state of genuine *samadhi* and its conscious attainment can transform the character. When someone who has experienced genuine *samadhi* returns to normal consciousness, he is not the same person he was before. Outwardly he may appear to be the same, but inwardly he is totally transformed. His condition is like that of a sword that has been turned into gold by the touch of the mythical philosopher's stone and can no longer be used as a weapon to commit violence.

The God-consciousness of such a person has two states: when he closes his eyes, he sees that God alone exists, and when he opens his eyes, he sees that God has become everything. God-consciousness can also be of three states, as in the life of Sri Chaitanyadeva: the inmost, the semiconscious, and the conscious. In the inmost mood, Chaitanyadeva would be absorbed in *samadhi*, totally unconscious of the outer world. In the semiconscious state, he would dance in ecstasy but would not be able to talk. In the conscious mood, he could only chant the name of the Lord and sing His glories.

The essence of all spiritual progress is advancement toward God-consciousness. This is also true of progress in meditation. The different states of *samadhi* attained through meditation are only different levels of God-consciousness, with the state of *nirvikalpa samadhi* being the culmination of all.

Can God-consciousness, which is an inner realization, really

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

be verified objectively? What are the right criteria for such verification? The various systems of Hindu thought differ in their views on this.

Some maintain that the validity of any spiritual knowledge or experience depends upon its correspondence and conformity with the object of such knowledge or experience, as verified by its coherence with the general experiences of everyday life. Moreover, such knowledge or experience, in order to be correct, must serve as an incentive to actions that fulfill a practical need. As examples, these systems point out that a piece of seashell mistaken for real silver can never serve the purpose of real silver nor fulfill a need for it, and that the water seen on the desert as a mirage can never quench the thirst of the perceiver nor moisten the sands of the desert. The same view is shared by some Buddhist thinkers who hold that the validity of any knowledge depends upon its practical usefulness and value. The knowledge, they say, that reveals an object must also be capable of producing the desired effect.

But according to nondualistic Vedanta, the tests of correspondence, coherence, and practical efficacy, although useful for verifying knowledge of diversity, cannot be applied to spiritual knowledge. Vedanta contends the criterion of correspondence is indirect and therefore insufficient. In trusting this criterion, one must infer from the harmony of experience that a real correspondence exists between the knowledge of an object and the object itself. But such harmony, if it is evidenced, can be said to be true only if it is not contradicted. For example, our general experience leads us to believe the sun moves around the earth: we "see" it do so daily. This phenomenon was believed to be true for almost fifteen hundred years until the time of Galileo, who proved that it was otherwise. During that period, although man's cognition was wrong, it served his purposes. Therefore, although an experience may seem to cohere with the accepted facts of everyday life, it may turn out to be untrue. Regarding the test of practical efficacy, it may be said also that a false cognition sometimes leads to the fulfillment of a purpose. For instance, a person searching for a jewel may mistake the luster of a jewel for the jewel itself, approach it, and actually get the jewel. Although the luster in the example was mistaken for the jewel, such a mistake did actually lead to the fulfillment of the purpose.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

According to Vedanta, there are three tests of inner enlightenment. First, it is *avadita,* that is, the experience of such enlightenment is not contradicted by any other subsequent experience. This is the only test possible, for all other tests ultimately fall back on this one.

Second, inner enlightenment is *aviruddha,* that is, an experience that does not come into conflict with our everyday experiences of the world of reality, just as our adult experiences do not negate those of our childhood. Third, it is *sarve bhute hiteratah,* or always conducive to the welfare of all beings.

The knower of Self transcends all injunctions of scriptures and conventions of society, yet is incapable of making a false step or setting a bad example. He is not just pure and good but the very embodiment of purity and goodness: these virtues, which he practiced as preparation for enlightenment, now become an integral part of his life. He does not seek them, but they follow him like his shadow. Therefore, whatever he does cannot help but be conducive to the good of all.

All three tests of Vedanta refer to the conduct and behavior of the illumined soul, whose transformation of character objectively testifies to his spiritual attainment. What an aspirant truly thinks, feels, and experiences is best verified by his behavior, actions, and reactions in everyday life and by the atmosphere he carries with him.

In the *Bhagavad Gita,* Arjuna asks Sri Krishna: "What, O Kesava, is the description of the man of steady wisdom merged in *samadhi?* How does the man of steady wisdom speak, how sit, how move?"[2] In reply, Sri Krishna describes the characteristic behavior of such a person, and these characteristic attributes of a man of steady wisdom are also the means of attaining such wisdom. The more an aspirant advances toward Self-Knowledge or Self-Realization, the more those attributes become manifest in his conduct and behavior. Conduct and behavior, actions and reactions are the sure indicators of what a person really believes to be true in the inmost core of his heart. A worldly person believes that the sense-perceived world is the most real, and therefore it engages his entire mind. But a saint knows for certain that God is the Reality of all realities, and his conduct and behavior always reflect that consciousness of God: he sees everything as his own Self or as the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

transfiguration of his Chosen Ideal, and therefore all his actions become acts of worship.

Transformation of character and personality, the most objective indicator of progress in meditation, has observable signs that become manifest in the physical, mental, and vital apparatus of the aspirant as he advances in the path. The scriptures and traditions of Yoga and Vedanta, in various contexts, mention these signs as the following:

1. improvement of health
2. integration of personality
3. increased mastery over the mind and the senses
4. steadfastness in the vow of *brahmacharya*, or continence
5. steadfastness in renunciation, dispassion, purity, and truthfulness
6. longing for God and one-pointed devotion to one's Chosen Ideal
7. taste of inner bliss

Improvement of Health

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* mentions the following: "The precursors of perfection in yoga, they say, are lightness and healthiness of the body, absence of desire, clear complexion, pleasantness of voice, sweet odour, and slight excretions."[3] Regarding these signs, Swami Vivekananda says:

> As the bodily organization becomes finer and finer, it will be found in the beginning that the least irregularity throws one out of balance. One bit of food more or less will disturb the whole system, until one gets perfect control, and then one will be able to eat whatever one likes. When one begins to concentrate, the dropping of a pin will seem like a thunderbolt going through the brain. As the organs get finer, the perceptions get finer. These are the stages through which we have to pass, and all those who persevere will succeed.[4]

In another context, Swami Vivekananda mentions:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> The first effect of this practice is perceived in a change of expression in one's face. Harsh lines disappear; with calm thought, calmness comes over the face. Next comes a beautiful voice. I never saw a yogi with a croaking voice. These signs come after a few months' practice.[5]

Good health is the first sign of spiritual advancement. The Romans used to say, "*Mens sana in corpore sano*" (A sound mind in a sound body.) Spiritual fitness is preceded by physical fitness and mental fitness. The following conversation of Swami Vivekananda with a disciple is pertinent in this context:

> Swami Vivekananda: First build up your physique. Then only can you get control over the mind. "This Self is not to be attained by the weak."
>
> Disciple: But sir, the commentator (Shankara) has interpreted the word "weak" to mean "devoid of *brahmacharya* or continence."
>
> Swami Vivekananda: Let him. I say, "The physically weak are unfit for the realisation of the Self."
>
> Disciple: But many dull-headed persons also have strong bodies.
>
> Swami Vivekananda: If you can take the pains to give them good ideas once, they will be able to work them out sooner than physically unfit people. Don't you find in a weak physique it is difficult to control the sex-appetite or anger? Lean people are quickly incensed and are quickly overcome by the sex-instinct.
>
> Disciple: But we find exceptions to the rule also.
>
> Swami Vivekananda: Who denies it? Once a person gets control over the mind, it matters little whether the body remains strong or becomes emaciated. The gist of the thing is that unless one has a good physique one can never aspire to Self-Realisation. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "One fails to attain Realisation if there be but a slight defect in the body."[6]

Deepened self-perception is the result of meditation. Each degree of success in this deepening of self-awareness frees the body

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

and the mind of the aspirant to that extent from their various conditionings of indulgent living, which cause waste of energy and vigor. The inner freedom and spontaneity derived from this deconditioned mind become manifest in the aspirant's behavioral transformation, characterized by his unagitated speech, amiable temper, cheerful disposition, and healthy look. The more healthy the body, the less there is body-consciousness. A healthy body frees the mind from body-consciousness, while a weak body continually draws all the attention of the mind to itself.

Integration of Personality

Practice of meditation leads to a gradual liberation of our inner consciousness from its identification with our body and mind. Such liberation is always reflected in the increased integration of our thoughts, words, emotions, and actions. Liberation, according to Yoga and Vedanta, does not mean being transported to another realm or attaining something that we did not have before. It is Self-Realization—a burning realization that destroys all that is false and imaginary in us and reveals before us our true Self. Self-Realization changes not the world but the individual. Psychologically, it is rousing ourselves from self-created inner polarization, division, and distraction to experience the reality of unified and harmonious existence.

One of the supplications of the Lord's Prayer in Christianity is "Thy kingdom come": the fulfillment of the prayer presupposes that one will voluntarily give up the kingdom of the ego upon realizing its frailty and futility. Yoga and Vedanta similarly maintain that liberation, in order to be meaningful, must be attainable while living, because there cannot be any otherworldly solution for a worldly problem. Any worthwhile solution has to be found in the context of the problem itself.

Furthermore, both Yoga and Vedanta maintain that the desire for Self-Realization is the natural urge in every living being. What prevents us from attaining this Self-Realization is not something external but rather inner conditionings of our mind and body, consisting of complexes, constraints, phobias, and fantasies acquired through indulgent living.

Four causes underlie all the afflictions of our life: egoism, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. These four, says Patanjali

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

in his *Yoga Aphorisms* (2.3), spring from our deep-seated habitual forgetfulness of our true Self and therefore of the world of reality. Our sufferings are due not to the things of the world but to our attitude toward those things. The essence of bondage is egocentricity, which does not let us perceive things as they are. The ego must have things that it cannot have and does not need. It longs for the impossible and seeks the unattainable. The ego perpetually strains itself looking for real solutions for problems that are imaginary. Liberation is a transformation from egocentricity to ego-transcendence, from unconscious and automatic living to free and spontaneous living, from the depths of inertia to the heights of illumination.

In meditation we deepen our self-awareness by voluntarily transcending the wakeful and dream states, and the effect of this self-awareness becomes reflected in our personality and behavior. An average person is heavily weighed down by egocentricity. He is divided and distracted by the demands of his body and mind. He is lost in the process of becoming. He never for a moment thinks that his psychophysical complex is a borrowed instrument, partly derived from nature and partly inherited, and that he is separate and different from it. Totally identified with his ego, he cannot act but only reacts. Devoid of self-expression, his life is punctuated by a series of self-explosions in the form of anger, hatred, jealousy, and so forth. He is compulsive because he is unable to be creative. The *Uddhava Gita* describes the state of such a personality:

> The tongue attracts the man to one direction and thirst to another; the sex-impulse draws somewhere and skin, stomach, and ears to other quarters; the nose attracts in one direction, the restive eyes elsewhere, while the tendency for work draws to something else—all these undermine the man like so many wives of a householder.[7]

Creativity and spontaneity are the first fruits of meditation. They proceed from a profound self-awareness. The practice of deepening our self-awareness requires us to be what the *Bhagavad Gita* calls *yukta,* or integrated in goal, aspiration, and effort:

> Yoga is not for him who eats too much nor for him who eats too little. It is not for him, O Arjuna, who sleeps too

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> much nor for him who sleeps too little. For him who is temperate in his food and recreation, temperate in his exertion at work, temperate in sleep and waking, yoga puts an end to all sorrows.[8]

An average person's spiritual goal and spiritual efforts are not well integrated because his thinking, feeling, willing, and acting do not support but instead oppose each other. Most often his spiritual goal is subordinated to his material and worldly goals. In his efforts he does not follow moderation but swings from indulgence to asceticism, pessimism to optimism. Integration of personality is the alignment of all one's thoughts, words, deeds, and aspirations to spiritual aspiration. An integrated life, according to Yoga and Vedanta, is a grand symphony of many reflexes, impulses, desires, emotions, thoughts, and purposes. As the millions of cells of the human body must be well harmonized to produce a balanced physique, so must the multiple centers of our personality also be well integrated to make that symphony a reality. The more we are able to get a glimpse of our real Self in meditation, the more we are able to achieve this harmony.

Meditation enables us to discover the rhythm of integrated living, which is marked by withdrawal from and response to the everyday world. Mere withdrawal without response is meaningless, while mere response without withdrawal is disastrous. The more active we are, the more we are required to be meditative. The more the musical instruments in an orchestra are played, the more they need tuning. Meditation is to the mind what sleep is to the body. Meditation is the inbreathing of life, while activity represents its outbreathing. Meditation, like a gyroscope, helps the aspirant maintain his poise and balance in the midst of the turbulence of life. Sincerely pursued, meditation becomes the aspirant's second nature and follows him like his shadow in every action and thought, enabling him to function as two voices singing in counterpoint.

Through meditation our individual self communes with the cosmic Self, as represented by our Chosen Ideal. These moments of communion lift us out of all egocentric involvements and infuse us with a quantum of inner serenity that heals the wounds of our mind, filling it with new strength to face the challenges of life. This inner

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

serenity brings in its wake a stabilizing effect on our everyday life and makes it more efficient, creative, and purposeful. Our daily contact and communication with the external world of countless diversities temporarily overwhelms our knowledge of the unity of existence. As a result, our perception of diversities becomes exaggerated and heightened, and we lose the distinction between the Reality that is permanent and eternal and the realities that are impermanent or relatively permanent. Proficiency in meditation restores our true vision of reality.

The sure sign of an individual's inner integration is his behavioral transformation. Such a person is always sincere, honest, and straightforward in thought, word, and action. Because he is honest with himself, he is honest with others. His honest intentions are always reflected in his conduct and behavior. Truthful in all circumstances, he not only desists from lying in any form but does not exaggerate, misrepresent, manipulate, or distort facts to suit his own convenience and self-interest. Free from all sense of guilt, he enjoys peace of mind. What he really is and what he appears to be are always the same, and so he is never secretive. He neither broods over the past nor dreams about the future. He acts in the living present; being of clean conscience, he does not procrastinate or vacillate in his decisions or actions. Positive in his outlook, he is always ready to learn and grow in wisdom. He accepts the trials and tribulations of life as they come and does not blame anyone or anything for them. Grounded in self-awareness, he is neither aggressive nor defensive in dealing with others. He is spontaneous, efficient, and creative. Moderation is his motto, discrimination is his guideline, and Self-Knowledge is his goal.

Inner integration, according to the *Bhagavad Gita,* is marked by the rise of the quality of *sattva* (spiritual balance) in an individual over the qualities of *rajas* (restlessness) and *tamas* (inertia). *Sattva* manifests itself as honesty of conduct, promptness, freedom from dependence and anxiety, discrimination between right and wrong, skill in action, fortitude and forbearance in the face of unfavorable circumstances, even-mindedness, firm faith, and contentment. Opposed to *sattva* are *rajas* and *tamas: rajas* is characterized by greed, overactivity, overambition, enterprise, unrest, and longing; *tamas* by darkness, indolence, inadvertence, and delusion.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The three qualities, or *gunas,* are present in every individual in differing proportions, and these differing proportions of the *gunas* make for the difference between one personality and another. An individual in whom *sattva* prevails over *rajas* and *tamas* is said to be *sattvika;* an individual in whom *rajas* prevails over *sattva* and *tamas* is said to be *rajasika;* an individual in whom *tamas* prevails over *sattva* and *rajas* is said to be *tamasika.* The rise of *sattva* leads to inner integration, the rise of *rajas* to tension, and the rise of *tamas* to disintegration and destruction. In keeping with these three divisions, all personalities come under three broad categories of *sattvika, rajasika,* and *tamasika.*

The *Bhagavad Gita* describes in detail the characteristic behavior patterns of the three types of personalities in regard to their faith, food preferences, worship, practice of austerity, making of gifts, knowledge of reality, performance of action, character pattern, sense of discrimination of right and wrong, firmness of mind, and sense of happiness:

Faith. The *sattvika* person worships the gods; the *rajasika* person worships demigods and demons; and the *tamasika* person worships ghosts and disembodied spirits.

Food Preferences. The *sattvika* person favors food that promotes longevity, vitality, strength, health, pleasure, and appetite, and that is succulent, oleaginous, substantial, and agreeable. The *rajasika* person prefers food that is excessively bitter, sour, salty, hot, acrid, dry, and burning. The *tamasika* person likes food that is poorly cooked, tasteless, putrid, stale, unclean, and left over.

Worship. The *sattvika* person follows scriptural rules and orthodox observances and worships for the sake of worship; the *rajasika* person's worship is desire-prompted and ostentatious; and the *tamasika* person's worship is whimsical and devoid of faith.

Practice of Austerity. The *sattvika* person is steadfast, full of faith, thorough, and not prompted by any desire for worldly gain. The *rajasika* person practices austerity for display and in order to gain respect, recognition, and honor. The *tamasika* person's practice of austerity is self-torture, based on foolishness, and for the purpose of doing harm to others.

Giving Gifts. The *sattvika* person gives gifts expecting no return and from a sense of duty, giving at the right place, at the right

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

time, and to a worthy person. The *rajasika* person makes gifts in a grudging mood, expecting results, and for the sake of recompense. The *tamasika* person gives without respect, at an improper place and time, and to an unworthy person.

Knowledge of Reality. The *sattvika* person sees undivided unity in the midst of diversities; the *rajasika* person sees only diversities; the *tamasika* person's knowledge of reality is trivial, meaningless, and not founded on truth.

Performance of Action. The *sattvika* person acts with non-attachment, desiring no gain; the *rajasika* person acts in order to gratify his own egotistical desires and with much effort; the *tamasika* person is indiscriminate, irresponsible, and careless in regard to the consequences and results of his actions.

Character Pattern. The *sattvika* person is free from attachment and aversion, is endowed with fortitude and zeal, and is unaffected by success and failure. The *rajasika* person is passionately attached to his action; hankers after its fruits; is greedy, violent, and impure; and is easily carried away by joy and sorrow. The *tamasika* person is vulgar, unsteady, arrogant, deceitful, malicious, indolent, despondent, and procrastinating.

Discrimination between Right and Wrong. The *sattvika* person is always guided by spiritual consideration; the *rajasika* person's sense of discrimination is distorted and faulty because it is heavily colored by personal desires and attachments; the *tamasika* person's sense of discrimination is enveloped in darkness and delusion.

Firmness of Mind. The *sattvika* person shows unswerving concentration and self-control; the *rajasika* person exhibits firmness of mind in his pursuit of pleasure, wealth, and fulfillment of desires; the *tamasika* person's firmness is a form of rigidity that will not give up stupidity and delusion, sleep, fear, grief, despondency, and sensuality.

Sense of Happiness. The *sattvika* person's happiness is an inner state born of the clear knowledge of the Self, which may be like poison at first but like nectar in the end. The *rajasika* person's happiness is born of the contact of the senses with their objects, and it is like nectar at first but like poison in the end. The *tamasika* person derives happiness from sleep, sloth, error, and inertia.

In brief, a *sattvika* person is guided by spiritual consideration,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

a *rajasika* person by self-interest, and a *tamasika* person by inertia. Integration is thus an inner movement, a progression from the state of inertia *(tamas)* and self-affirmation *(rajas)* toward the state of spiritual balance *(sattva)*. An individual may be said to be attaining inner integration and progressing well in his path of meditation when a *sattvika* behavioral pattern becomes more and more evident in him. No matter what path the aspirant follows, the quality of *sattva* is vital to him. It is the precursor of all spiritual success and, therefore, of success in meditation. Inner integration paves the way for concentration of mind and meditation. As Sri Ramakrishna says: "Sattva is the last step of the stairs; next is the roof. As soon as sattva is acquired there is no further delay in attaining God. One step forward and God is realized."[9]

Increased Mastery over the Mind and the Senses

The next important signs of transformation of character and personality indicating progress in meditation are increased steadiness of mind and mastery over the senses. In meditation, steadiness of mind and steadfastness in practice go hand in hand, one complementing the other. The mind cannot become steady unless one meditates, and one cannot meditate unless the mind is steady. An undisciplined mind is unsteady and therefore incapable of concentration. It is unsteady because it is weak; and it is weak because it is wasteful, losing 75 percent of its energy merely in contending with its inbuilt divisions and complexes. Yet an adept in meditation can prevent this waste. His mind, like a compass always pointing to the north, remains fixed on the object of meditation. Even when the needle of the compass is moved, the moment it is left to itself, it swings back to its original position. Similarly, if the mind of an advanced aspirant is forced to dwell on the objects of the world, it immediately reverts to a state of meditation as soon as it is left to itself. The advanced aspirant is able to maintain his meditative mood even when intensively active. He keeps 75 percent of his mind in meditation, employing the rest for daily activities.

An aspirant's success in meditation can be inferred from the way he performs actions. An umbrella is best tested in rain. The field of action is both a training ground for the mind and a testing ground

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

of meditative knowledge, because the same mind is used for both meditation and action. To see God with closed eyes in the depth of meditation is called *jnana*, or Self-Knowledge. *Jnana* is not complete unless the aspirant is able to see God in all beings and things of the world with his eyes open. What we perceive in the external world is the reflection of what we see within us. The greater the aspirant's progress, the more he is able to translate his meditative experiences into actions. His field of activity is then no longer a hindrance but serves as a powerful support for his meditation. Further, he gains confidence in his practice of meditation through his efficient performance of action. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says, "Yoga is skill in action."[10]

Increased steadiness of mind manifests itself in increased efficiency, concentration, foresight, and memory. Compared with the average person, an aspirant advancing in meditation is able to do more things in less time. He is thorough yet quick. He develops a powerful memory and a penetrating insight. His perceptions become keen and his powers of observation clear. His mind has been compared to a lump of dough that sticks to the place where it is thrown. Such a mind can attach itself to and detach itself from any object at will.

Swami Turiyananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, says in regard to this subject: "One test of the steadiness of mind is the steadiness of look. As soon as the mind gets steady, the look also gets steady. No more is there any restiveness in one's looks and movements."[11]

All practices of Yoga result in the steadiness of mind. As the *Uddhava Gita* says:

> Charity, the performance of one's duty, the observance of vows, general and particular, the hearing of the scriptures, meritorious acts, and all other works—all these culminate in the control of the mind. The control of the mind is the highest yoga. Say, of what use are charity and the rest to one whose mind is controlled and pacified? Of what use, again, are this charity and the rest to one whose mind is restless or lapsing into dullness?[12]

Steadiness of mind results from self-control, and self-control is the control over both the mind and the senses. The two most

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

powerful enemies on the path of meditation are lust and anger. Lust is the longing one feels for a sense object that is seen, heard, or remembered; anger is felt when there is obstruction in the fulfillment of one's lustful propensities. Lust and anger create violent agitation of mind, accompanied by appropriate physical changes. One of the signs of an aspirant's progress in meditation is his developing capacity to withstand these impacts. Success in meditation is directly proportional to success in self-control. The *Bhagavad Gita* points out:

> The man whose mind is not under his control has no Self-knowledge and no contemplation either. Without contemplation he can have no peace; and without peace, how can he have happiness? For even one of the roving senses, if the mind yields to it, carries away discrimination as a gale carries away a ship on the waters.[13]

The *Bhagavad Gita* goes on to say: "He who is able to withstand the force of lust and anger even here before he quits the body—he is a yogi, he is a happy man,"[14] and "Yoga is hard to attain, I think, by a man who cannot control himself; but it can be attained by him who has controlled himself and who strives by right means."[15]

The mind comes under control when the senses are controlled, and the senses are controlled when the palate and the sexual urge—the two most powerful senses—are restrained. The *Shrimad Bhagavatam* states: "A man who has controlled all other senses except the palate is not to be considered a master of his senses. When the hankering of the palate is controlled, everything is controlled."[16]

Swami Turiyananda discusses this point in the following illustration:

> All trouble is over if the palate and sex impulse are conquered. When Sri Chaitanya went to Keshava Bharati for initiation into *sannyasa,* the latter remarked: "You are in the bloom of youth and so surpassingly handsome. Who will be bold enough to initiate you into *sannyasa?*" Sri Chaitanya replied, "Sir, you usually examine an aspirant before conferring *sannyasa* on him. If you find me quali-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

fied, you will naturally be inclined to initiate me also. So please examine me and see if I am fit for it." Bharati said to Sri Chaitanya, "Put out your tongue." On the disciple's putting out his tongue, the guru put some sugar on it. The sugar was left as it was, without being moistened in the least, and was scattered in the air the moment it was blown out. There was no more need to examine the sexual instinct.[17]

To quote Swami Turiyananda further:

Control of the senses is not to be brought about by a violent effort. Only by realizing Him is it perfectly achieved. But at first one must struggle for this end. Afterwards it becomes quite natural. Still one should not be over-confident. Just as the intelligent hunter catches a deer and ties it up, so after succeeding in controlling the organs one should be alert, and continue to hold the mind and organs in check.... Those who are sexually pure take some fifty years to root out the sex impulse; while those who have led an indifferent life take several lives to do it.... If there is no object of sense-enjoyment in front of you when you discriminate, you may feel that you have no weakness. But as soon as the object of temptation comes, you are upset.... One must be established in discrimination. One must dwell in that. Without that no result will come. He is indeed wise whose mind does not react though the objects of enjoyment come before him. This is the test.[18]

As has been stressed earlier, meditation depends upon concentration, and concentration depends upon withdrawal of the mind, which, again, depends upon self-control. Self-control, which signifies mastery over the mind and the senses, is therefore the secret of all success in meditation. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* describes self-control as the sole practice for Self-Knowledge. Self-control, the *Katha Upanishad* says, is the very essence of Yoga:

Know the atman to be the master of the chariot; the body, the chariot; the *buddhi* [discriminating faculty], the charioteer; and the mind, the reins. The senses, they say, are the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> horses; the objects, the roads.... A man who has discrimination for his charioteer, and holds the reins of the mind firmly, reaches the end of the road; and that is the supreme position of Vishnu [the all-pervading Consciousness].... When the five instruments of knowledge stand still, together with the mind, and when the intellect does not move, that is called the Supreme State. This, the firm control of the senses, is what is called yoga.[19]

In his *Vivekachudamani,* Shankaracharya points out:

> The first steps to yoga are control of speech, non-receiving of gifts, entertaining of no expectations, freedom from activity, and always living in a retired place.... Whoever seeks to realise the Self by devoting himself to the nourishment of the body, proceeds to cross a river by catching hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log.[20]

Self-control, according to the *Bhagavad Gita,* is of three kinds—control of body, speech, and mind. Physical austerities, such as vows, penances, and service to others, constitute control of body. To practice truthfulness under all conditions is control of speech. Restraint of the senses and practice of concentration on the object of meditation make for control of mind.

Steadfastness in the Vow of *Brahmacharya,* or Continence

The most vital aspect of self-control is the practice of *brahmacharya,* or continence. According to *Jnana Sankalini Tantra,* "Torturing the body is no austerity—*brahmacharya* is the best austerity. A person of unbroken continence is no man but a god."[21] Practice of *brahmacharya* prepares the ground from which the life of meditation sprouts.

Brahmacharya is the most important practice of *yama* and *niyama*—the first two of the eight limbs of Yoga according to Patanjali. Accomplishment in the other six limbs (posture, control of breath, withdrawal of mind, concentration, meditation, and absorption in *samadhi*) depends upon steadfastness in *yama* and *niyama.* *Yama* consists of nonviolence, truthfulness, noncovetousness, con-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

tinence, and nonreceiving of gifts; *niyama* consists of cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study of sacred texts, and devotion to God. But the practices of *yama* and *niyama* bear no fruit unless followed scrupulously in thought, word, and deed.

Brahmacharya is the key to everything. In fact, the practice of cleanliness, external and internal,[22] is solely for the sake of *brahmacharya.* Patanjali affirms this, saying: "When he [the aspirant] is established in internal and external cleanliness, there arises in him disgust for his own body and desire for non-intercourse with others."[23] The *Bhagavad Gita* describes steadfastness in *brahmacharya* as vital for success in meditation: "Completely serene and fearless, steadfast in the vow of a *brahmachari,* disciplined in mind, and ever thinking on Me, he should sit in yoga, regarding Me as his Supreme Goal."[24]

The practice of *brahmacharya* has two aspects, abstention and observance, both of which must be adhered to in thought, word, and deed. Abstention means control of the sex-instinct. But merely abstaining from gross sex-enjoyment is not enough. The lust of the mind must be overcome, too, by abstaining from all lustful thoughts, imaginations, and conversations, for an unchaste imagination is as harmful as an unchaste act. Abstention is considered to be complete when all the sense organs—hands and feet; organs of speech, evacuation, and generation; eyes, ears, nose, skin, and palate—are withdrawn from every form of lustful enjoyment, however trivial and indirect.

Observance, the second aspect of the practice of *brahmacharya,* is "dwelling on Brahman," which is the literal meaning of the Sanskrit word *brahmacharya.* Practice of abstention depends upon dispassion for all lustful enjoyments. But such dispassion is never possible unless the aspirant develops passion for the spiritual goal and tastes spiritual joy.

Further, dwelling on Brahman implies steadfastness in worship and *japa* (repetition of a holy name). According to orthodox Hindu traditions, only an adept in the practice of *japa* can successfully maintain the vow of *brahmacharya.* Desiring Brahman alone, the spiritual seekers practice *brahmacharya,* says the *Katha Upanishad* (1.2.15). Practice of continence is bound to be repressive and counterproductive unless there is a strong spiritual motivation

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

for it. As long as the aspirant is not convinced of the reality of the spiritual goal and is not wholly dedicated to it, his practice of continence proves to be an impossible task. No one can ever succeed in meditation without being established in *brahmacharya:* the door to the inner recess of the heart never opens to one who does not practice it. *Brahmacharya* is not repression, nor is it an end in itself; it is the indispensable means for freeing the mind from its compulsive addiction to carnal pleasures. Steadfastness in the practice of continence brings in its wake improvement of health and vigor of mind, together with tremendous willpower and tenacity of purpose.

An aspirant steadfast in this vow develops within what is called *medha,* a fine nerve of retentive memory and intuition, by which he is able to grasp subtle spiritual truths and realize them quickly. His face then begins to shine with a divine luster. Each measure of conquest over the animal instinct within fills his heart with spiritual confidence, enthusiasm, and joy as he advances undaunted along the path.

Lack of steadfastness in the vow of *brahmacharya* makes the aspirant weak, irresolute, intellectually and physically debilitated, and a sure prey to despair and depression. For a spiritual seeker determined to make progress in meditation, there is no substitute for *brahmacharya* because there is no alternative to self-control. Intellectual comprehension of the techniques of meditation, control of breath, mastery over posture, and so on, prove to be useless to one making compromises in the practice of *brahmacharya.*

Emphasizing the practical need for *brahmacharya,* Swami Vivekananda observes:

> The yogis claim that, of all the energies that are in the human body, the highest is what they call ojas. Now, this ojas is stored up in the brain, and the more ojas a man has, the more powerful he is, the more intellectual, the more spiritually strong. One man may express beautiful thoughts in beautiful language, but cannot impress people. Another man may not be able to give beautiful expression to his thoughts, yet his words charm; every movement of his is powerful. That is the power of ojas.
>
> Now, in every man there is stored up more or less of this

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

ojas. The highest form of all the forces that are working in the body is ojas. You must remember that it is only a question of transformation of one force into another. The same force which is working outside as electricity or magnetism will be changed into inner force; the same force that is working as muscular energy will be changed into ojas. The yogis say that that part of the human energy which is expressed through sexual action and sexual thought, when checked and controlled, easily becomes changed into ojas; and since the Muladhara [basic center of spiritual energy] guides these, the yogi pays particular attention to that centre. He tries to convert all his sexual energy into ojas. It is only the chaste man or woman who can create ojas and store it in the brain; that is why chastity has always been considered the highest virtue. A man feels that if he is unchaste, his spirituality goes away; he loses mental vigor and moral stamina. That is why, in all the religious orders of the world which have produced spiritual giants, you will always find absolute chastity insisted upon. That is why there came into existence monks, who gave up marriage. There must be perfect chastity in thought, word, and deed. Without it the practice of raja-yoga is dangerous and may lead to insanity. If people practice raja-yoga and at the same time lead an impure life, how can they expect to become yogis?[25]

Christ exhorts his disciples to practice *brahmacharya*, saying:

All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.[26]

And Sri Ramakrishna says: "Whoever can give up the sex idea can spurn the world."[27]

There is a vast difference between theoretical understanding

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

of mastery over the mind and senses and actually gaining this mastery. Baffled by the immensity of the task, Arjuna says to Sri Krishna: "The mind, O Krishna, is restless, turbulent, powerful, and obstinate. To control it is as hard, it seems to me, as to control the wind." To this, Sri Krishna replies: "Doubtless, O mighty Arjuna, the mind is restless and hard to control; but by practice and by detachment, O son of Kunti, it can be restrained."[28] "Detachment" is dispassion, and "practice" is practice of concentration. Dispassion helps the mind to withdraw from the objects of the senses, while practice of concentration directs it to the spiritual goal. These two greatly augment each other, since the practice of concentration strengthens dispassion and dispassion strengthens the practice of concentration. But they must go together. Concentration without dispassion is fruitless, and dispassion by itself is negative. Unallied with the practice of concentration, dispassion only suppresses desires and distracting tendencies, but cannot root out their causes. And when suppressed or repressed, desires and tendencies go underground to wait for an opportune moment to spring back with full fury.

Moreover, a desire for an object, when suppressed, causes a heightened awareness of that very object. Thus, one who beats down a strong hankering for something invariably becomes haunted by that very thing—all the time, even in dreams. As long as the aspirant shows interest in the objects of worldly enjoyment, those objects of enjoyment also show interest in him, pursuing him everywhere and giving him no peace. However, once the aspirant gets a taste of inner bliss, he loses all interest in worldly enjoyment, and the objects of enjoyment, likewise, lose interest in him. As Swami Vivekananda says: "Woman exists for man as long as he has lust. Free from lust, one sees no difference between man and woman."[29] And as the *Bhagavad Gita* points out: "The objects of the senses fall away from a man practicing abstinence, but not the taste for them. But even the taste falls away when the Supreme is seen."[30]

The positive counterpart of dispassion, then, is passion for the spiritual goal. This is the meaning of discrimination between the real and the unreal. In fact, dispassion becomes positive when it is for the sake of the spiritual goal. Discrimination and dispassion together carry the sincere aspirant to the core of Self-Knowledge, which is the goal of all meditation. Self-Knowledge then glows in

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

his heart as the shining lamp of wisdom. Shankaracharya describes this lamp as follows:

> Characterized by discrimination; fed with the oil of contentment due to divine love; fanned by the wind of earnest meditation on the Lord; furnished with the wick of right intention purified by the cultivation of piety, chastity, and the other virtues; held in the chamber of the heart devoid of worldliness; placed in the sheltered recess of the mind withdrawn from sense-objects and untainted by attachment and aversion; shining with the light of right knowledge generated by incessant practice of concentration and meditation.[31]

Self-Knowledge or God-vision, the goal of meditation, is neither a miracle nor a vicarious experience. Nothing happens by chance: we get only what we deserve. Anything that is not earned by our own efforts never belongs to us. Self-Knowledge is a revelation of Truth. It comes in a flash, but the preparation for it takes a long time. The revelation of Self-Knowledge depends upon success in meditation, and success in meditation depends upon the fitness of the aspirant. In the *Vivekachudamani*, Shankaracharya says: "Success depends essentially on a qualified aspirant; time, place, and other such means are but auxiliaries in this regard."[32]

A qualified aspirant is one who has acquired moral and ethical fitness through inner purification. Moral fitness endows the aspirant with the capacity to assimilate the teaching of meditation, practice meditation properly, and persevere until the goal is reached. Assimilation of the teaching is more than intellectual understanding. Such assimilation is not possible through mere study of scriptures.

The Upanishads maintain that Truth remains hidden in the words of the scriptures as a king in a royal procession remains hidden by flags and parasols, or as butter remains unperceived in milk and salt in the water of the ocean.

The dialogue between Narada and the sage Sanatkumara in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (7.1) illustrates the meaning of assimilation. Narada approached the sage Sanatkumara as a seeker and prayed for instruction. He had studied the various branches of knowledge, sacred and secular, but still was not at peace. Sanatkumara

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

asked Narada to tell him what he had studied. In reply, Narada gave a long list of the names of the various philosophies and scriptures that he had studied and the many sciences and arts he had mastered. After hearing everything from Narada, Sanatkumara said to him: "All you have known through your study is only a name and not the meaning, which is the Self." This meaning, Sanatkumara went on to say, is never revealed to a person devoid of inner purification. He instructed Narada to practice austerities for inner purification.

Shankaracharya describes four means of inner purification that an aspirant must adopt in order to acquire fitness for the practice of meditation. These are discrimination, dispassion, self-control, and intense yearning for liberation. Discrimination is the firm conviction that Brahman, or God, alone is real and all else illusory. Dispassion is the utter disregard for all sense-enjoyments, earthly or heavenly. Self-control consists of (1) calming the mind by withdrawing it from all sense objects and directing it to the Self; (2) restraining all the organs of sense from going outward; (3) holding the organs of sense, so restrained, in their respective centers, and not allowing them to drift out again toward objects; (4) cheerfully bearing all affliction, physical or mental, for the sake of the goal; (5) constant and conscious dwelling of the mind on the Self; and (6) having firm faith in the words of the scriptures and in the instruction of the teacher. Intense yearning for liberation means a burning desire to free oneself from all bondage and attachment.

Sri Ramakrishna says that an aspirant with such yearning looks on all of life as a journey toward the goal of Self-Knowledge. For him, the world appears to be a foreign land where no one is really his own, and he is anxious to return to his true home as soon as possible. A person anxious to reach a destination journeys toward it hurriedly; in fact, his mind arrives there long before he does. In the same way, an aspirant anxious to reach the goal of Self-Knowledge journeys toward it with great energy and single-mindedness. As he moves toward the goal, his thoughts and feelings about it become increasingly intense, until the desire to attain it becomes his only thought. The *Bhagavad Gita* describes the marks of a progressing aspirant: He lives alone yet is not lonely, is firmly grounded on his inner Self, unaffected by pain or pleasure, praise or blame; is contented, same-sighted, averse to seeking any limelight or receiving any favors, has

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

given up all hope and expectation for anything external, and is utterly indifferent to everything except the goal.

Self-Knowledge, the Vedantic scriptures maintain, rests on the solid foundation of austerity and self-control. Sri Krishna, after concluding the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita,* says to Arjuna: "You must not speak about it to one who is not austere in life or who is without devotion, nor to one who does not wish to hear, nor to one who speaks ill of Me."[33] The Vedas state that the profound secrets of Self-Knowledge reveal their true meaning only to those who have cultivated supreme devotion to the Lord and also to their spiritual preceptors. The *Mundaka Upanishad* says: "This Atman, resplendent and pure, whom the sinless *sannyasins* behold residing within the body, is attained by unceasing practice of truthfulness, austerity, right knowledge, and continence."[34] Of Self-Knowledge, the *Kena Upanishad* says: "Austerities, self-restraint, and sacrificial rites are Its feet, and the Vedas are all Its limbs. Truth is Its Abode."[35] The *Mundaka Upanishad* concludes with the following two verses:

> A Rik-verse declares: This Knowledge of Brahman should be told to those only who have performed the necessary duties, who are versed in the Vedas and devoted to Brahman, and who, full of faith, have offered oblations in the Ekarshi Fire and performed, according to rule, the rite of carrying fire on the head. [The rite refers to a penance mentioned in the Atharva-Veda, through the practice of which the aspirant acquires purity of heart and concentration of mind for Self-Knowledge.] Thus the seer Angiras declared this truth in olden times. A man who has not performed the vow should not read it. Salutation to the great seers! Salutation to the great seers![36]

The meaning of the text is that the mind of the seeker must be purified by the performance of religious vows and the practice of spiritual austerities. Such performance and practice endow him with fitness for the practice of meditation on Brahman. The Knowledge of Brahman should not be imparted to an impure person.

The Upanishads describe the seeker of Self-Knowledge by the word *brahmacharin,* or one who practices continence and self-control for attainment of the goal. The story of Satyakama in the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Chhandogya Upanishad (4.4.1–4.9.3) beautifully illustrates the austerity as well as the profound faith of one such *brahmacharin*. Satyakama was a young boy who wished to attain Self-Knowledge. In those days, a religious student lived for years in the house of a teacher, serving the latter, studying, and practicing self-control and meditation. Thus, Satyakama came to the sage Gautama, saying, "Revered Sir, I wish to live with you as a *brahmacharin*. May I approach you, Sir, as a pupil?" Gautama asked, "Of what ancestry are you, my dear?" Satyakama replied, "I do not know, Sir, of what ancestry I am. I asked my mother about it, and she replied 'In my youth I was preoccupied with many household duties and with attending on guests when I conceived you. I do not know of what ancestry you are. I am Jabala by name, and you may speak of yourself as Satyakama Jabala.' I am therefore, Sir, Satyakama Jabala." Greatly pleased at Satyakama's answer, Gautama said to him, "None but a true *brahmin* would thus speak out. You have not swerved from truth." [That is to say, none but a true spiritual seeker would give such a straightforward reply, which could possibly be taken to mean that he was a person of illegitimate birth.] "Fetch the fuel, my dear; I shall initiate you." After initiating Satyakama, Gautama separated out four hundred lean and weak cows from his herd and said, "Go with these, my dear, and tend them." Obediently driving the cows away, Satyakama said, "I shall not come back until they number one thousand."

For years Satyakama dwelt in the forest with the cows, and his loving care of them was his major spiritual practice. So absorbed was he in constant thought of his cherished goal that he lost all track of time. Then one day, the bull of the herd said to him, "Satyakama, we have become a thousand, take us to the teacher's house. I will teach you one foot of Brahman: The east is one quarter, the west is one quarter, the south is one quarter, the north is one quarter. This, dear friend, is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four quarters, and this foot is called 'shining.' He who knows this and meditates on this foot of Brahman becomes shining on earth." The bull further said, "Agni [fire] will teach you another foot of Brahman." Satyakama understood that the presiding deity of air, being pleased with his austerity, faith, and self-control, taught him about Brahman through the bull; thus he treated the bull with great respect.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The following day, Satyakama drove the cows in the direction of the teacher's house. Toward evening, he penned the cows, lit a sacrificial fire, and sat down in meditation behind the fire, facing east. As he meditated, he heard the fire say, "Satyakama, I will declare to you one foot of Brahman: The earth is one quarter, the sky is one quarter, heaven is one quarter, the ocean is one quarter. This, dear friend, is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four quarters, and this foot is called 'endless.' He who knows this and meditates on this foot of Brahman becomes endless on earth and conquers endless worlds." Fire, representing energy, taught Satyakama that Brahman is the source of all energy. Satyakama realized that the energy of his own body was identical to the energy sustaining the whole universe.

The next day, Satyakama continued his journey. When evening came, he again penned the cows, lit the sacred fire, and sat down to meditate. Then a swan flew to him and said, "Satyakama, I will declare to you one foot of Brahman: Fire is one quarter, the sun is one quarter, the moon is one quarter, lightning is one quarter. This, dear friend, is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four quarters, and this foot is called 'luminous.' He who knows this and meditates on this foot of Brahman becomes luminous on earth and conquers luminous worlds." Satyakama then understood that the sun, in the form of a swan, instructed him that Brahman as the light of all lights illumines everything.

On the third evening, as Satyakama was seated in meditation behind the sacred fire, a diver-bird flew to him, saying, "Dear friend, I will declare to you one foot of Brahman: The *prana* is one quarter, the eye is one quarter, the ear is one quarter, the mind is one quarter. This, dear friend, is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four quarters, and this foot is called 'having support.' [That is to say, the mind is the support of the experiences of all the other organs.] He who knows this and meditates on this foot of Brahman possesses a support on earth and conquers the worlds that offer a home." The diver-bird, representing *prana*, or life force, taught Satyakama that Brahman is the life of all life. Satyakama perceived that the life force pulsating in his body was identical to the life force of the whole universe.

When Satyakama reached the teacher's house, Gautama said, "My dear, you shine like one who knows Brahman. Who has taught

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

you?" "Others than men," Satyakama humbly replied, meaning that various presiding deities had assumed forms to teach him. Then he added, "But I wish, revered Sir, that you alone should teach me"—thus demonstrating his faith in his teacher and his loyalty to him. Gautama then taught him the same knowledge; and nothing was left out.

Through the story of Satyakama, the *Chhandogya Upanishad* points out that Self-Knowledge, the goal of all meditation and worship, is an inner revelation that depends solely on the aspirant's strength of character. This strength cannot be borrowed from others or given to us by anyone. Nor can it be acquired through mechanical means. Strength of character rests on the foundation of faith and is supported by austerity and self-control. "The stainless world of Brahman belongs to them in whom there is no crookedness, no falsehood, no deception," says the *Prasna Upanishad*.[37] By his faith, austerity, and self-control, Satyakama attained to purity of mind. Thereupon, in the depth of his meditation, he perceived the reality of all-pervading Brahman, eternally revealed in the universe. So, Swami Vivekananda says:

> So long as we have no knowledge of our real nature, we are beggars, jostled about by every force in nature and made slaves of by everything in nature. We cry all over the world for help, but help never comes to us. We cry to imaginary beings and yet it never comes. But still we hope help will come; and thus in weeping, wailing, and hoping, this life is passed and the same play goes on and on. Be free. Hope for nothing from anyone. I am sure if you look back upon your lives you will find that you were always vainly trying to get help from others which never came. All the help that ever came was from within yourselves.[38]

There are two other stories in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (4.10.1–4.14.3, 8.7.1–8.12.6) that describe the spiritual quest of a *brahmacharin*—the story of Upakoshala and that of Indra and Virochana.

For twelve years, Upakoshala, the son of Kamala, dwelt as a *brahmacharin* with Satyakama, the son of Jabala, tending the teacher's sacred fires. As the other pupils finished their Vedic studies, Satyakama gave them the final teaching and sent them home; but

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

he gave no instruction to Upakoshala. At this, Satyakama's wife said to him: "This *brahmacharin*, practicing austerities, has devotedly tended your fires. Give him instruction lest the fires should blame you." Satyakama, however, went away on a journey without teaching him further. The *brahmacharin* out of mental grief began to fast. Seeing him fast, Satyakama's wife said: "Brahmacharin, why do you not eat?" He said: "There are in a man like me many desires directed to many objects. I am full of sorrows. I will not eat." Thereupon the fires, reflecting on Upakoshala's faithfulness and devotion, said among themselves: "This *brahmacharin*, practicing austerities, has devotedly tended us. Come, let us teach him." Then they told him: "*Prana* (the life force), on which everything depends, is Brahman, the space within the heart is Brahman, and the joy that one experiences while meditating upon the luminous space within the heart is Brahman."

After that, each fire gave Upakoshala separate instruction. First the Household Fire taught him: "Earth, fire, food, and the sun are all forms of Brahman, and also the person that is seen in the sun." Then the Southern Fire told him: "Water, the quarters, the stars, and the moon are all forms of Brahman, and also the person that is seen in the moon." Lastly the Eastern Fire said to him: "*Prana* (the life force), *akasha* (space), heaven (the upper regions), and lightning are all forms of Brahman, and also the person that is seen in the lightning." When Satyakama returned, he said to Upakoshala: "My dear, your face shines like one who knows Brahman. Who has taught you?" Upakoshala repeated some of what the fires had told him. To this Satyakama said: "They told you, my dear, only about the manifestation of Brahman, but I shall tell you about the whole of Brahman. As water does not cling to the lotus leaf, so evil does not cling to one who knows this." Satyakama then taught Upakoshala the Supreme Truth of Brahman.

The message of the story is that Brahman, the all-pervading Self, remained unperceived by Upakoshala until, his mind attaining purity through the practice of austerity and self-control, he renounced all desires.

According to the story of Indra and Virochana, Prajapati, the Creator, once proclaimed: "The Self which is free from sin, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger, free from

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

thirst, whose desires come true, and whose thoughts come true—That it is which should be searched out, That it is which one should desire to understand. He who has known this Self (from the scriptures and a teacher) and understood It obtains all the worlds and all desires." The proclamation reverberated through all spheres, and, hearing it, both gods and demons wanted to learn the secret of Self-Knowledge. Leaving behind their regal trappings, Indra, the king of the gods, and Virochana, the king of the demons, came to Prajapati for instruction and lived with him for thirty-two years as *brahmacharins.*

After thirty-two years Prajapati asked them, "For what purpose have you both been living here?" and they replied that they were desirous of having that Self-Knowledge through which one obtains all the worlds and all desires. Prajapati said to them: "The person that is seen in the eye—that is the Self. This is immortal, fearless. This is Brahman." (His reference was to the Supreme Self, which may be seen in meditation.) Then he asked them to cleanse themselves and put on their best clothes and ornaments and look at their reflections in a pan of water, wishing to show them that the mutable body is not the Self. When they saw their reflections, he asked them, "What do you see?" They answered: "Just as we ourselves are well adorned, well dressed, and clean, so, venerable Sir, are these two reflections well adorned, well dressed, and clean." Thinking they might understand in time, Prajapati repeated: "This is the Self, this is immortal, fearless. This is Brahman."

They both went away satisfied in heart. Seeing them go, Prajapati said: "They are both going away without having known and without having realized the Self. And whoever of these, whether gods or demons, follow this doctrine shall perish." Virochana rejoined the demons and preached, "The body is the Self, and this alone is to be worshipped and served." But Indra, after proceeding some way, reflected: "The Self cannot be the body, because the body is subject to change and decay. I do not see any good in this doctrine." And he went back to Prajapati and told him his difficulty. Prajapati said: "Live with me another thirty-two years practicing *brahmacharya.*" When that time elapsed, Indra was taught that the dream self is the true Self, Brahman, and he left satisfied. Soon he returned, however, questioning how the suffering dream self could

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

be immortal. Again Prajapati told Indra to live with him as a *brahmacharin* another thirty-two years, and when that time expired he explained that the Self is that which is perceived in dreamless sleep. Once more Indra left, only to return again, unable to comprehend the meaning. Now Prajapati said: "I shall explain the Self further to you, and nothing else. Live with me another five years."

At the end of the five years, Prajapati at last taught Indra that the Self is incorporeal, all-pervading, and immortal. Thus even Indra, the king of the gods, had to patiently practice *brahmacharya* for one hundred and one years, to remove the impurities from his heart, before he could attain the Knowledge of the Self.

Brahmacharya is the renunciation of lust and greed. It is the essence of all self-control, penances, and austerities. Sri Ramakrishna says: "Blessed is he who feels longing for God, though he eats pork. But shame on him whose mind dwells on 'woman and gold,' though he eats the purest food—boiled vegetables, rice and ghee."[39] Sri Ramakrishna says further that one who has been able to give up lustful enjoyments for the sake of Self-Knowledge or God-vision has already covered three-fourths of the journey.

Brahmacharya is often thought to be a discipline meant only for monks and ascetics, and not for householders. Also, many think its practice necessary only for beginners on the spiritual path. Both notions are ill-conceived and erroneous. The scriptures and traditions of Yoga and Vedanta consider *brahmacharya* the very foundation of life. Its practice is essential not only for the first stage of life but through all its stages, whether a person is a householder or a monk. According to the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, only one who has successfully passed through the disciplines of *brahmacharya* is entitled to advance to the next stage:

> When the brahmachari (i.e., the boy undergoing brahmacharya) shines like fire due to the faithful performance of great penances, when his sins and past evil tendencies have been burnt down by them and he has acquired love for Me (the Lord), then the preceptor will examine him (with respect to his knowledge); having passed the test the boy should offer honorarium to the guru and take his purificatory bath with his [guru's] permission, and then that

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> good scion of the twice-born classes may take to a householder's life or to the life of a recluse or forthwith to the fourth stage of life, viz. sannyasa, according to his own choice.[40]

Sannyasa, the fourth stage of life, is the culmination of the other three. Any compromise in the practice of *brahmacharya* makes the entire structure of life weak and unsteady. All material, intellectual, and spiritual fulfillments depend solely on this primary virtue. A person devoid of *brahmacharya* cannot but fail in any walk of life—that of the householder, forest-dweller, monk, or mystic. *Brahmacharya* is the source of all strength and secret of all charisma. As Sri Ramakrishna says: "When a man succeeds in the conservation of his sexual energy, his intellect reflects the image of Brahman, even as a sheet of glass gives a perfect image when its back is painted with mercury solution. The man who carries this image of Brahman in his heart is able to accomplish everything—he will succeed wonderfully in whatever action he engages himself."[41]

And Swami Vivekananda says: "The chaste person has tremendous energy and gigantic will-power. Without chastity there can be no spiritual strength. Continence gives control over mankind. The spiritual leaders of men have been continent, and this is what gave them power."[42]

Brahmacharya cannot be successfully practiced by violent means such as overexercise and extreme asceticism. An aspirant must follow the path of moderation. Sex-consciousness, being a part of body-consciousness, can only be overcome by overcoming body-consciousness. Swami Brahmananda, one of Sri Ramakrishna's foremost disciples, says: "There are certain rules which a *brahmacharin* must observe. He must avoid exciting food, oversleep, over-exercise, laziness, bad company, and evil conversations."[43] One desiring to practice continence is advised to take food that is wholesome, pure, substantial, agreeable, and strength-giving. He should fill only one half of his stomach with food and one quarter with water, leaving one quarter empty for the passage of air. He should eat small quantities of nutritious food at different times throughout the day rather than a large amount at any one time. He is asked to control his appetite and eat very little after sunset. In sleep and rest he must be

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

temperate. Nighttime is considered best for the practice of meditation. Sri Ramakrishna says, "There are three classes of people who keep awake at night: *yogis* (seekers of God), *bhogis* (seekers of enjoyment), and *rogis* (people who are sick)."[44]

Both overexercise and laziness are to be avoided. The former dissipates energy needlessly, while the latter merely increases inertia. Taking pleasure in the company of the incontinent or in lustful conversations is really indulging in indirect sex-gratification and therefore should be shunned. According to Swami Vivekananda, "Unchaste imagination is as bad as unchaste action."[45] Thought begets action. When the mind dwells on a thought, it develops a tendency to repeat that thought. Through repetition there arises a liking for the thought. When this liking deepens, there springs a desire to possess the object of thought. Thus, a person first becomes unchaste in thought, however inadvertently. Then, dwelling long on that thought, he develops a liking for it, and this liking ultimately impels him to commit an unchaste act. So the *Bhagavad Gita* says: "When a man dwells on objects, he feels an attachment for them. Attachment gives rise to desire, and desire breeds anger. From anger comes delusion; from delusion, the failure of memory; from the failure of memory, the ruin of discrimination; and from the ruin of discrimination the man perishes."[46]

Lust is the greatest obstacle in the path to God-realization. To quote Tulsidas, an Indian poet-saint: "Where there is *kama* (lust) there is no Rama (God)." Lust pursues a spiritual seeker through every stage of his journey and appears to him wearing various disguises. The greater his advancement, the subtler become the disguises of lust. Unless the seeker proceeds with great caution, he is likely to be deluded. There is the story of an earnest young novice at a monastery who used to give spiritual counsel every afternoon to some visiting women devotees. He appeared to be overzealous in this respect. The abbot noticed it and gently warned him about the possible danger of self-delusion. At this, the novice said: "Sir, they are sincere devotees. Should I not help sincere souls on the path to God?" The abbot replied, "My son, the earth is pure and so is rainwater. But when the two come together, they often make mud. Hence one should always be vigilant."

The seeker overcomes lust completely only after the direct

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

vision of God. In fact, one of the proofs of God-vision is the consequent freedom from lustfulness. Sri Ramakrishna says: "He who has realized God does not look upon a woman with the eye of lust; so he is not afraid of her. He perceives clearly that women are but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. He worships them all as the Mother Herself."[47]

Continence, the conquest of lust, is the essence of all virtues. Regarding this, Swami Turiyananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, said the following to an aspirant:

> "Lust and anger are the characteristics of a jiva [embodied soul]. By gradually freeing itself from lust and gold, the jiva at last becomes one with God. From constant thinking of evil things, of lust and gold, a man's body becomes changed—facial expression gets changed. After committing a sin, however much you may try to hide it, all will be in vain, your very face will betray you. Even an ordinary man will be able to find you out, not to speak of those who know thought reading. It is the eyes which give the clearest indication. The appearance of those who commit dacoity [robbery] or murder is altogether of a different kind. Have you not marked that? A man with a very beautiful appearance becomes very ugly-looking by committing heinous deeds; whereas a great sinner, who, perhaps through the grace of some holy man, has turned over a new leaf, begins to look beautiful. I have seen these things with my own eyes. Conquer lust. Assert your independence.
>
> "Conquer lust even before it can conquer you. Once lust gets control over you, you are done for. It is just like what happens in wrestling feats. In wrestling, if once you fall below, you are done for. Through discrimination and devotion to God one can be free from lust. With the gradual increase of love for God, lust, anger, etc., wane out. While going to visit Sri Ramakrishna, as soon as I would enter the gate of the Dakshineswar temple-garden I would feel a palpitating sensation in the heart. Many would feel like that—because the thought of going near

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> a very holy presence would create in us a sense of awe. When one goes to a holy presence, one's sins within begin to tremble." [One disciple then asked:] "What about those who had no sin in their minds? Did their hearts tremble too?" [Swami Turiyananda replied:] "Yes, they did. For who was there as pure as Sri Ramakrishna? Even the purest among us was insignificant in comparison with Sri Ramakrishna. When any contrary thought would cross my mind, he would at once detect that and say, 'Why do you look so? Perhaps this is the reason.' And what was my wonder, he would say exactly the real thing. How fearless is he whose conscience can say that he has done no wrong."[48]

For those who feel intense devotion for their Chosen Ideal, the practice of continence is easy. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult for aspirants who perceive their Chosen Ideal as nonliving or as an abstract ideal, and hence do not feel any devotion for It.

The practice of continence is the austerity of all austerities. Swami Brahmananda once told a group of disciples:

> "Austerities are of many kinds. Once I saw a man who had taken a vow not to sit or lie down for twelve years. When I met him only five or six months remained of this period. Continuous standing for so many years had made his legs swell as they do in elephantiasis. When he slept he held himself up by a rope.
>
> "Some practice the austerity of standing all night in deep water in the winter and at the same time performing japam [repetition of God's name]. Again there is the austerity of sitting in the blazing summer sun in the center of four fires." [Someone then asked:] "Is that what austerity means?" "Good gracious, no! [Swami Brahmananda replied.] Generally men practice such austerities with the hope that in their next lives they may be born rich and find greater worldly enjoyments."
>
> "Do they gain their wishes?" [the Swami was asked.] "God only knows!" [he said. Swami Brahmananda was asked further:] "What then is real austerity?" [to which he

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

replied:] "Those are not real austerities. Anyone can practice them. The body is easily controlled, but it is another matter to control the mind. It is very difficult to renounce lust and greed, and to give up the desire for name and fame.

"Real austerity is based upon these three principles: First, take refuge in the truth. Truth is the pillar to which you must always hold while performing any action. Second, conquer lust. Third, renounce all cravings. Observe these three principles. That is real austerity, and the greatest of these is to conquer lust. It has been declared in our scriptures that he who practices continence for twelve years can easily attain God. This is the most difficult task. I can tell you from my own experience that it is not possible to meditate properly unless you keep continent. The craving of lust is very subtle, and extremely difficult to control. That is why a spiritual aspirant must always be careful in associating with the opposite sex. Through continence a special power is stored up in the brain. If a man becomes established in continence, he will begin to see the expression of God everywhere. But remember, it is not possible to practice continence without devoting yourself to the practice of japam."[49]

In brief, one who is not a seeker of God can never practice continence. No amount of regulation of diet and breath, exercise and posture, or ceremonial observance is of any avail without devotion to God. Indeed, the practice of *brahmacharya* under such circumstances proves to be counterproductive.

Emphasizing the need for devotion, Shankaracharya says: "For those whose mind is completely purified, this (raja-yoga) alone is productive of perfection. Purity of mind, again, is speedily accessible to those who are devoted to the teacher and the Deity."[50] In other words, those who have both implicit faith in the words of the guru and unflinching devotion to their Chosen Deity become free from all doubts and overcome all obstacles, and thus easily acquire concentration. This directly leads them to the realization of the highest truth.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Steadfastness in Renunciation, Dispassion, Purity, and Truthfulness

The fifth objective sign of progress in meditation is steadfastness in discrimination, dispassion, and renunciation. Shankaracharya says:

> Know, O wise man, dispassion and discrimination to be like the two wings of a bird in the case of an aspirant. Unless both are there, none can, with the help of either one, reach the creeper of liberation that grows, as it were, on the top of an edifice. The extremely dispassionate man alone has samadhi, and the man of samadhi alone gets steady realization; the man who has realized the Truth is alone free from bondage, and only the free soul experiences eternal bliss.[51]

Dispassion is thus the master key to any form of spiritual progress. Study of scriptures, reasoning, reflection, and so forth are useless if they do not arouse dispassion in the aspirant's mind. The attempt at meditation without dispassion has been compared by Nag Mahasaya, a great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, to the rowing of an anchored boat. One dark and stormy night several drunkards, wishing to take a boat ride, got into a boat and began to row furiously. They rowed and rowed the whole night through and thought surely they had gone a great distance. When dawn broke, they were dismayed to find that the boat had not moved at all—because they had not lifted the anchor. Similarly, an aspirant's countless rounds of meditation take him nowhere so long as he is devoid of dispassion.

There are many delusions and temptations that beset the path of meditation at its different stages. These are the opposition and reactions of the aspirant's own mind. Discrimination and dispassion protect an aspirant from them—they keep him from getting lost or going astray. In real terms, the extent of an aspirant's progress along any path depends upon the degree of discrimination and dispassion he is imbued with. Discrimination enables us to detect all that is false in us—our fantasies, imaginations, pretenses, and attachments. Dispassion burns up the false and reveals before us the reality of the all-pervading Self. Bhartrihari, a poet-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

saint, illustrates in the *Vairagya Satakam* the thoughts of a dispassionate mind:

> The life of man (as ordained) is limited to one hundred years; half of it is spent in night, and out of the other half, one half again is passed in childhood and old age; and the rest, which has its illness, bereavements, and troubles, is spent in serving (others). What happiness can there be for mortals in a life (again) which is even more uncertain than the ripples (on the surface) of water?[52]

These are not the morbid thoughts of a pessimist but the mature reflections of an illumined soul.

Shankaracharya similarly in the *Vivekachudamani* cautions all spiritual seekers about the futility of a spiritual quest without renunciation:

> In his case, verily, whose renunciation and yearning for freedom are intense, calmness and the other practices have (really) their meaning and bear fruit. Where [however] this renunciation and yearning for freedom are torpid, there calmness and the other practices are mere appearances like water in a desert!... The shark of hankering catches by the throat those seekers after liberation who have got only an apparent dispassion *(vairagya)* and are trying to cross the ocean of *samsara* (relative existence), and violently snatching them away, drowns them half-way.[53]

Regarding the marks of spiritual progress, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi says:

> What does a man become by realizing God? Does he grow two horns? No, what happens is that he develops discrimination between the real and the unreal, obtains spiritual consciousness, and goes beyond life and death....
>
> [Emphasizing the need of self-effort, Holy Mother says:] A seeker can realize God any moment by God's grace. But there is a difference between such realization and what comes in the fullness of time, as between mangoes that ripen out of season and those that ripen at the proper time.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The out-of-season ones are not very sweet.[54]

A man can sometimes stumble upon a spiritual experience without working for it. But he enjoys it more if he earns it by his own efforts. A man certainly enjoys more the fortune he has built up with his hands than what he inherits from his father. Also, as Holy Mother says:

> One realizes God in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him.... Once by way of testing a [monastic] disciple, Holy Mother said to him: "Why don't you return home? Live in the world, earn money, and bring up a family." "But, Mother, please do not say that," the disciple said. He wept as he spoke. Holy Mother replied with great tenderness: "My child, please do not weep. You are a living God. Who is able to renounce all for His sake? Even the injunctions of destiny are canceled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with its own hand what it has foreordained for such a person."[55]

Swami Vivekananda states:

> The test of progress is the amount of renunciation that one has attained. Where you find the attraction for lust and wealth considerably diminished in a person, to whatever creed he may belong, know that his inner spirit is awakening. The door of Self-realisation has surely opened for him. On the contrary, if you observe a thousand outward rules and quote a thousand scriptural texts, and still if it has not brought the spirit of renunciation in you, know that your life is in vain.[56]

And again:

> Without renunciation, without burning dispassion for sense-objects, without turning away from wealth and lust as from filthy abomination, "Never can one attain salvation even in hundreds of Brahma's cycles." Repeating the names of the Lord, meditation, worship, offering oblations in sacred fire, penance—all these are for bringing forth renunciation.[57]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Speaking of renunciation, Sri Ramakrishna says:

> There are two kinds of renunciation: intense and feeble. Feeble renunciation is a slow process; one moves in a slow rhythm. Intense renunciation is like the sharp edge of a razor. It cuts the bondage of maya easily and at once.
>
> One farmer labours for days to bring water from the lake to his field. But his efforts are futile because he has no grit. Another farmer, after labouring two or three days, takes a vow and says, "I will bring water into my field today, and not till then will I go home." He puts aside all thought of his bath or his meal. He labours the whole day and feels great joy when in the evening he finds water entering his field with a murmuring sound. Then he goes home and says to his wife: "Now give me some oil. I shall take my bath." After finishing his bath and his meal he lies down to sleep with a peaceful mind.
>
> A certain woman said to her husband: "So-and-so has developed a spirit of great dispassion for the world, but I don't see anything of the sort in you. He has sixteen wives. He is giving them up one by one." The husband, with a towel on his shoulder, was going to the lake for his bath. He said to his wife, "You are crazy! He won't be able to give up the world. Is it ever possible to renounce bit by bit? I can renounce. Look! Here I go." He didn't stop even to settle his household affairs. He left home just as he was, the towel on his shoulder, and went away. That is intense renunciation.
>
> There is another kind of renunciation, called "markata-vairagya," "monkey renunciation." A man, harrowed by distress at home, puts on an ochre robe and goes away to Benares. For many days he does not send home any news of himself. Then he writes to his people: "Don't be worried about me. I have got a job here."[58]

True renunciation is the renunciation of lust and gold. Swami Vivekananda, in his poem "Song of the Sannyasin," says: "Truth never comes where lust and fame and greed of gain reside. No man

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

who thinks of woman as his wife can ever perfect be; nor he who owns the least of things, nor he whom anger chains, can ever pass through maya's gates."[59]

Swami Vivekananda further says:

> There are other hindrances on the path even after renouncing those two [lust and wealth]; then, for example, comes name and fame. Very few men, unless of exceptional strength, can keep their balance under that. People shower honours upon them, and various enjoyments creep in by degrees. It is owing to this that three-fourths of the tyagis [renouncers] are debarred from further progress.... It is true that the mind can never turn to God until the desire for lust and wealth has gone from it, be the man a householder or a sannyasin. Know this for a fact, that as long as the mind is caught in these, so long true devotion, firmness, and shraddha (faith) can never come.... To satisfy our smaller desires and have done with them for ever, and to relinquish the greater ones by discrimination—that is the way. Without renunciation God can never be realised.... The mind becomes tarnished by constant contact with the objects of the senses and receives a permanent molding and impress from them.... Renunciation, and renunciation alone, is the real secret, the mulamantra, of all realisation.... Renunciation is the true background of all religious thoughts wherever it be, and you will always find that as this idea of renunciation lessens, the more will the senses creep into the field of religion, and spirituality will decrease in the same ratio.... The real aim of sannyasa is "for the highest freedom of the self and the good of the world." Without having sannyasa none can really be a knower of Brahman—this is what the Vedas and the Vedanta proclaim. Don't listen to the words of those who say, "We shall both live the worldly life and be knowers of Brahman." That is the flattering self-consolation of crypto-pleasure seekers.... No freedom without renunciation. Highest love for God can never be achieved without renunciation.... Nobody attains freedom without shaking off the coils of worldly worries.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> The very fact that somebody lives the worldly life proves that he is tied down to it as the bondslave of some craving or other. Why otherwise will he cling to that life at all? He is the slave either of lust or of gold, of position or of fame, of learning or of scholarship. It is only after freeing oneself from all this thraldom that one can get on along the way of freedom. Let people argue as loud as they please. I have got this conviction that unless all these bonds are given up, unless the monastic life is embraced, none is going to be saved, no attainment of Brahmajnana [Knowledge of Brahman] is possible.... Getting the human birth, when the desire for freedom becomes very strong and along with it comes the grace of a person of realisation, then men's desire for Self-Knowledge becomes intensified. Otherwise the mind of men given to lust and wealth never inclines that way. How should the desire to know Brahman arise in one who has the hankering in his mind for the pleasure of family life, for wealth and for fame?[60]

The *Bhagavad Gita,* giving directions for the practice of meditation, says: "A yogi should always try to concentrate his mind, retiring into solitude and living alone, having subdued his mind and body and got rid of his desires and possessions."[61] The words "solitude," "living alone," and "got rid of his desires and possessions" indicate that meditation is to be practiced with renunciation. As Shankaracharya says, where renunciation and yearning for freedom are torpid, there all other practices are mere appearances, like water in a desert.

Discrimination and renunciation alone can purify the mind, and it is only the purified mind that can attain absorption in meditation. Visits to places of pilgrimage or bathing in holy waters or other purificatory rites or ceremonies prove to be futile unless they are accompanied by discrimination and renunciation. The true shrine is the inner recess of the heart, the true deity is the Atman (the inner Self), and the true worship is meditation on the Atman. External shrines and deities are mere symbols of the internal one. All external and formal ceremonies and worship culminate in absorption in the inner Self. Shankaracharya, in his *Self-Knowledge,* says:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> He who, renouncing all activities, worships in the sacred and stainless shrine of Atman, which is independent of time, place, and distance; which is present everywhere; which is the destroyer of heat and cold, and the other opposites; and which is the giver of eternal happiness, becomes all-knowing and all-pervading and attains, hereafter, Immortality.[62]

The shrine of the inner recess of our heart is the holiest of all holy places. Often there are difficulties in making pilgrimages to external shrines. They may be at a great distance, and a visit to them may entail hardship. The merit of pilgrimage may not accrue to the pilgrim because his visit is inauspiciously timed. Or the purpose of the pilgrimage may be vitiated by other unforeseen circumstances. The shrine of the heart, on the other hand, is free from all such difficulties. A sacred verse says: "By seeing the Lord seated on the chariot, one attains immortality." But this is not merely seeing an image of the Lord seated on a wooden chariot, as is the popular belief. It is seeing Him as our inner self seated in the chariot of the body. Commenting upon the verse, Swami Vivekananda says: "The sight of the Atman is the real vision of Jagannatha [the Lord of the Universe].... If the sight of the Lord's image on a wooden framework confers liberation on people, then tens of millions of them would be liberated every year."[63]

The mere external and mechanical observance of spiritual disciplines does not bring about the desired spiritual transformation. A seeker or pilgrim devoid of discrimination and dispassion may be likened to a *kamandalu*, the water pot carried by a wandering monk. The water pot, which is made out of a large bitter gourd, accompanies the monk to many places of pilgrimage yet does not lose its bitterness. Likewise, a seeker devoid of discrimination and dispassion may undertake pilgrimages to holy places and perform various kinds of worship, yet he never attains any spiritual transformation. Regarding internal and external worship, the *Uttara Gita* says, "The twice-born worships the Deity in fire, the *munis* [holy men given to solitude and contemplation] contemplate Him in the heart, men of limited wisdom see Him in the image, and the yogis who have attained same-sightedness behold Him everywhere."[64] The

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Narada Pancharatra states: "What need is there of penance if God is worshipped with love? What is the use of penance if God is not worshipped with love? What need is there of penance if God is seen within and without? What is the use of penance if God is not seen within and without?"[65] Further, a song by Madan, a poet-saint of Bengal whose songs Sri Ramakrishna often sang, begins with the lines: "Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kashi, Kanchi, or Prabhas [five places of pilgrimage], so long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name upon my lips? What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more, if he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours?"[66] Such supreme worship in the inner shrine of the Atman is possible only for one who is imbued with the spirit of true renunciation—renunciation of lust and gold.

The *Mahabharata* describes Atman as the most sacred river, bathing in which the soul becomes free of impurities:

> The river of Atman is filled with the water of self-control; truth is its current, righteous conduct its banks, and compassion its waves. O son of Pandu, bathe in its sacred water; ordinary water does not purify the inmost soul. By worshipping a holy man who worships in the sacred shrine of Atman, the seeker obtains the result of pilgrimages. A visit to holy men bestows merit, because they may be regarded as moving holy places. The Lord, dwelling in their hearts, renders holy the place where they live. A river filled with sacred water is no doubt sacred; an image of stone or clay is no doubt a deity. After worshipping them a long time, the aspirant becomes pure. But by a mere visit to a holy man one attains purity.
>
> Communion with Brahman is the most efficacious form of worship: By virtue of even a moment's serenity, attained through knowledge of the identity of Atman and Brahman, the seeker attains the merit that one may obtain by bathing in the waters of all the holy rivers, by giving away the entire world in an act of charity, by performing a thousand sacrifices, by worshipping the three hundred and thirty millions of gods, and by rescuing, through after-death rites, one's ancestors from the suffering of the nether world. By the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> very birth of a man whose mind is absorbed in the Supreme Brahman—the immeasurable Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute—his family becomes sinless, his mother blessed, and the earth sacred.[67]

Renunciation has its counterpart in service. The seeker renounces the world as illusory in order to attain Self-Knowledge in the depth of his meditation. Self-Knowledge endows him with the vision of the oneness of the all-pervading Self. But this vision of oneness is not complete until and unless the seeker is also able to see the same Self with eyes open and feel an active concern for the welfare of all beings. Self-Knowledge and service are inseparable. They represent the two aspects of the same knowledge. The reality of a seeker's God-vision in meditation cannot but find expression in his everyday life of action. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says: "He who, having been established in oneness, worships Me dwelling in all beings—that yogi, in whatever way he leads his life, lives in Me. Him I hold to be the supreme yogi, O Arjuna, who looks on the pleasure and pain of all beings as he looks on them in himself."[68]

Longing for God and One-Pointed Devotion to One's Chosen Ideal

The sixth sign of progress in meditation is increased longing for God and one-pointed devotion to one's Chosen Ideal—the specific aspect of the Godhead chosen by the seeker for the practice of meditation. Swami Vivekananda says:

> Ekanistha, or devotion to one ideal, is absolutely necessary for the beginner in the practice of religious devotion. He must say with Hanuman in the *Ramayana:* "Though I know that the Lord of Sri [that is, Vishnu] and the Lord of Janaki [that is, Rama] are both manifestations of the same Supreme Being, yet my All in all is the lotus-eyed Rama." Or, as was said by the sage Tulsidas: "Take the sweetness of all, sit with all, take the name of all, say yea, yea—but keep your seat firm." Then, if the devotional aspirant is sincere, out of this little seed will come a gigantic tree, like the Indian banyan, sending out branch after branch and root after root

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> to all sides, till it covers the entire field of religion. Thus will the true devotee realize that He who was his own ideal in life is worshipped in all ideals, by all sects, under all names, and through all forms.[69]

This loyalty to one ideal is a form of orthodoxy, vital for spiritual growth. Orthodoxy gives depth. Those who are liberal from the very beginning lack depth and therefore never grow spiritually. So Swami Vivekananda says:

> The tender plant of spirituality will die if exposed too early to the action of a constant change of ideas and ideals. Many people, in the name of what may be called religious liberalism, may be seen feeding their idle curiosity with a continuous succession of different ideals. With them, hearing new things grows into a kind of disease, a sort of religious drink-mania. They want to hear new things just by way of getting a temporary nervous excitement, and when one such exciting influence has had its effect on them, they are ready for another. Religion is with these people a sort of intellectual opium-eating, and there it ends. "There is another sort of man," says Bhagavan Ramakrishna, "who is like the pearl-oyster of the story. The pearl-oyster leaves its bed at the bottom of the sea and comes up to the surface to catch the rain-water when the star Svati is in the ascendant. It floats about on the surface of the sea with its shell wide open until it has succeeded in catching a drop of the rain-water, and then it dives deep down to its sea-bed and there rests until it has succeeded in fashioning a beautiful pearl out of that raindrop." This is indeed the most poetical and forcible way in which the theory of Ishta-nishtha [devotion to the Chosen Ideal] has ever been put.[70]

Sri Ramakrishna describes how through one-pointed loyalty the seeker gradually attains God:

> First, the company of holy men. That awakens sraddha, faith in God. Then comes nishtha, single-minded devotion to the Ideal. In that stage the devotee does not like to hear anything but talk about God. He performs only those acts

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> that please God. After nishtha comes bhakti, devotion to God; then comes bhava. Next mahabhava, then prema, and last of all the attainment of God Himself.... Nishtha leads to bhakti; bhakti, when mature, becomes bhava; bhava, when concentrated, becomes mahabhava; and last of all is prema. Prema is like a cord: by prema God is bound to the devotee; He can no longer run away.[71]

One-pointed devotion gradually develops into love for the Chosen Ideal, and love makes the seeker long for a vision of It. Sincere longing has its signs. Sri Ramakrishna says:

> The man in whom longing for God manifests its glories is not far from attaining Him. What are the glories of that longing? They are discrimination, dispassion, compassion for living beings, serving holy men, loving their company, chanting the name and glories of God, telling the truth, and the like. When you see those signs of longing in an aspirant, you can rightly say that for him the vision of God is not far to seek.... At the approach of dawn the eastern horizon becomes red. Then one knows it will soon be sunrise. Likewise, if you see a person restless for God, you can be pretty certain that he hasn't long to wait for His vision. A disciple asked his teacher, "Sir, please tell me how I can see God." "Come with me," said the guru, "and I shall show you." He took the disciple to a lake, and both of them got into the water. Suddenly the teacher pressed the disciple's head under the water. After a few moments he released him and the disciple raised his head and stood up. The guru asked him, "How did you feel?" The disciple said, "Oh! I thought I should die; I was panting for breath." The teacher said, "When you feel like that for God, then you will know you haven't long to wait for his vision."... A man can see God if he unites in himself the force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the husband's attraction for the chaste wife, and the child's attraction for its mother. If you can unite these three forms of love and give it all to God, then you can see Him at once.[72]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Devotion, according to Narada, is "extreme love for some Being." According to Sandilya, it is "extreme attachment to Ishvara, the Lord." Shankaracharya defines devotion as "seeking after one's real nature." No real success in meditation is ever possible without devotion. Devotion plays a key role in effecting a connection between concentration and Self-Realization. Practices of self-control, penance, austerity, and so forth help the aspirant to gather his scattered mind; devotion attracts his mind toward the Ideal, bringing forth concentration; concentration leads to absorption; and absorption culminates in realization.

In the practice of meditation, the seeker passes through several stages before he reaches his final goal. The first stage is that of discipline. At this stage, his meditation is mechanical and effortful because it lacks the full commitment of his heart. As he develops loving attachment to his Chosen Ideal, he reaches the second stage, or the stage of love. The Chosen Ideal now appears real and living, and his meditation is spontaneous and effortless. The second stage leads to the third—that of absorption, at which the seeker's mind communes with the Chosen Ideal. The final stage is that of total absorption; by reaching this, the seeker's mind becomes one with the Chosen Ideal.

Taste of Inner Bliss

The seventh objective sign of progress in meditation is the taste of inner bliss. Self-Knowledge, the goal of meditation, is not mere Knowledge: it is also Consciousness and Bliss. Therefore, progress toward Self-Knowledge is marked by ever-increasing experiences of bliss. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* describes Brahman, the Supreme Self, as Consciousness and Bliss. The bliss of Brahman pervades all objects. It is the source of all joys. Brahman is bliss because It is infinite and beyond all sorrow. Sorrow is the result of loss, and there can be no loss in the Infinite. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* describes the blissful nature of the Supreme Self in the following words: "Joy is His head, satisfaction is His right side, great satisfaction is His left side, bliss is His trunk, and Brahman is His support."[73] The same Upanishad explains what is meant by this bliss:

> Let there be a noble young man who is well read [in the Vedas], very swift, firm, and strong, and let the whole world

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

be full of wealth for him—that is one measure of human bliss. One hundred times that human bliss is one measure of the bliss of human gandharvas [demigod musicians], and likewise of a great sage [learned in the Vedas] and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of the human gandharvas is one measure of the bliss of divine gandharvas, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of the divine gandharvas is one measure of the bliss of the Fathers, enjoying their celestial life, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of the Fathers is one measure of the bliss of the devas [gods] who are endowed with heavenly bodies through the merit of their lawful duties, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of the devas is one measure of the bliss of the devas who are endowed with heavenly bodies through the merit of their Vedic sacrifices, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of the sacrificial gods is one measure of the bliss of the thirty-three devas who live on the sacrificial offerings, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of the thirty-three devas is one measure of the bliss of Indra [king of the celestials], and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of Indra is one measure of the bliss of Brihaspati [spiritual preceptor of the gods], and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of Brihaspati is one measure of the bliss of Prajapati [first manifestation of the Absolute, known as the World Soul], and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires. One hundred times that bliss of Prajapati is one measure of the Bliss of Brahman, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.[74]

The bliss of Brahman has no comparison. The happiness that is enjoyed by different beings of the relative universe in only a

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

fraction of this bliss. Regarding the taste of bliss, Sri Ramakrishna says:

> The nearer you come to God, the more you feel peace. Peace, peace, peace—supreme peace! The nearer you come to the Ganges, the more you feel its coolness. You will feel completely soothed when you plunge into the river.... The bee buzzes as long as it is not sitting on a flower. It becomes silent when it begins to sip the honey. But sometimes, intoxicated with the honey, it buzzes again.... A typhoid patient has very little chance of recovery if he loses all taste for food; but his life need not be despaired of if he enjoys food even a little. That is why one should cultivate a taste for God's name. Any name will do—Durga, Krishna, or Siva. Then if, through the chanting of the name, one's attachment to God grows day by day, and joy fills the soul, one has nothing to fear. The delirium will certainly disappear; the grace of God will certainly descend.... There are signs that a man has had the vision of God. A man who has seen God sometimes behaves like a madman: he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings. Sometimes he behaves like a child, a child five years old—guileless, generous, without vanity, unattached to anything, not under the control of any of the gunas, always blissful.... If a man enjoys the bliss of God, he doesn't enjoy the world. Having tasted divine bliss, he finds the world insipid. If a man gets a shawl, he doesn't care for broadcloth.... People talk about leading a religious life in the world. But if once they taste the bliss of God they will not enjoy anything else. Their attachment to worldly duties declines. As their spiritual joy becomes deeper, they simply cannot perform their worldly duties. More and more they seek that joy. Can worldly pleasures and sex pleasures be compared to the bliss of God? If a man once tastes that bliss, he runs after it ever afterwards. It matters very little to him then whether the world remains or disappears.... People say they will hold to both God and the world. After drinking an ounce of wine, a man may be pleasantly intoxicated and also conscious

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> of the world; but can he be both when he has drunk a great deal more? After the bliss of God nothing else tastes good. Then talk about "woman and gold" stabs the heart, as it were. I cannot enjoy the talk of worldly people. When a man becomes mad for God, he doesn't enjoy money or such things.... There are three kinds of ananda, joy: the joy of worldly enjoyment, the joy of worship, and the Joy of Brahman. The joy of worldly enjoyment is the joy of "woman and gold," which people always love. The joy of worship one feels while chanting God's name and glories. And the Joy of Brahman is the joy of God-vision. After experiencing the joy of God-vision the rishis of olden times went beyond all rules and conventions.[75]

The taste of bliss is the most positive sign of progress in any spiritual path and particularly so in the path of meditation. Dispassion and discrimination, renunciation and self-control, all become steady only after the seeker has gotten the taste of inner bliss. As Shankaracharya says in his *Vivekachudamani:*

> The result of dispassion is knowledge, that of knowledge is withdrawal from sense-pleasures, which leads to the experience of the Bliss of the Self, whence follows Peace. If there is an absence of the succeeding stages, the preceding ones are futile. (When the series is perfect) the cessation of the objective world, extreme satisfaction, and matchless bliss follow as a matter of course.[76]

The state of *nirvikalpa samadhi,* or union with the Supreme Self, as spoken of in the texts of Vedanta, is the highest point of inner bliss. Shankaracharya beautifully describes the experience of that state:

> The majesty of the ocean of Supreme Brahman, replete with the swell of the nectar-like bliss of the Self, is verily impossible to express in speech, nor can it be conceived by the mind in an infinitesimal fraction of which my mind melted like a hailstone, getting merged in the ocean, and is now satisfied with that Essence of Bliss.[77]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Such is the nature of the intense bliss of *nirvikalpa samadhi* that the seeker cannot again return to outer consciousness. Totally overpowered by that bliss, he remains absorbed in that state, and his body drops off like a dry leaf after twenty-one days. Regarding this experience, the *Bhagavad Gita* says:

> That in which the mind, restrained by the practice of concentration, rests quiescent; that in which, seeing the Self through the self, one rejoices in one's own Self; that in which one knows the boundless joy beyond the reach of the senses and grasped only by the understanding; that in which being established, one never departs from Reality; that on gaining which one thinks there is no greater gain, and wherein established one is not moved even by the heaviest of sorrows (even the pain caused by a sword or other sharp weapon)—let that be known as yoga, which is severance from the contact of pain. It is to be practiced with perseverance and with an undaunted mind.[78]

The sage Narada, in his aphorisms on divine love, says:

> By attaining it, man becomes perfect, immortal, and satisfied forever. On attaining that, man does not desire anything else; he grieves no more, is free from hatred and jealousy; he does not take pleasure in the vanities of life; and he loses all eagerness to gain anything for himself. Realizing that, man becomes intoxicated and fascinated, as it were, because he is completely immersed in the enjoyment of the Bliss of the Atman, the truest and highest Self.[79]

The bliss of *nirvikalpa samadhi* is preceded by that of *savikalpa samadhi.* In this state, the seeker communes with the Self in the form of his Chosen Ideal. He feels that not he but his Chosen Ideal lives in him. The precursors of the *savikalpa samadhi* state are ecstasies, divine intoxication, and various depths of absorption. Hindu devotional scriptures regard chanting of the name of God and meditation as "drinking the wine of divine bliss." A line in a song by the poet-saint Ramprasad says: "I drink no ordi-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

nary wine, but wine of Everlasting Bliss, as I repeat my Mother Kali's name; it so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk!"[80]

After experiencing the bliss of *nirvikalpa samadhi,* the seeker becomes the knower of Truth. The knower of Truth is also known as a free soul. A free soul is an exemplar. He never makes a false step, never sets a bad example. He may behave like a five-year-old child, or like an inert thing, silent and motionless, or like a ghoul, going beyond all conventions and codes of conduct, or like a king, wearing a regal personality. The free soul wears no outward mark of holiness. Whether in contemplation or action, his Self-Knowledge is steady and his bliss constant. He sees himself in all beings and all beings in his own Self. He feels through all hearts, walks with all feet, eats through all mouths, and thinks with all minds. He does not dwell on the past, takes no thought for the future, and is indifferent about the present. He regards the pain and pleasure of others as his own pain and pleasure. Physical death and rebirth have no meaning for him, for he considers a change of body to be like a change of garments or like going from one room to another.

A free soul, though free in every respect, is not whimsical; he is spontaneous but not given to license. He may be blind or deaf or deformed, or he may feel hunger or thirst, or he may appear to be a victim of sorrow, yet he is never overwhelmed by these outward conditions. For him, the world is like a magic show, and he enjoys the performance because he has the constant awareness that it is magical.

The free soul transcends all the pairs of opposites—pain and pleasure, heat and cold, virtue and vice, and so on. He is not pure but purity itself, not enlightened but enlightenment itself. He becomes the very embodiment of all divine qualities such as humility, unselfishness, purity, and kindness. These qualities follow him like his shadow; he does not seek them, but they cling to him.

The following quotations from the *Vivekachudamani* describe the characteristic marks of a free soul:

> Established in the ethereal plane of Absolute Knowledge, he wanders in the world, sometimes like a madman, sometimes like a child and at other times like a ghoul, having no

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

clothes on his person except the quarters, or sometimes wearing clothes, or perhaps skins at other times. Though without riches, yet ever content; though helpless, yet very powerful; though not enjoying the sense-objects, yet eternally satisfied; though without an exemplar, yet looking upon all with an eye of equality. Though doing, yet inactive; though experiencing fruits of past actions, yet untouched by them; though possessed of a body, yet without identification with it; though limited, yet omnipresent is he.... He who feels just the same when his body is either worshipped by the good or tormented by the wicked, is known as a man liberated in life.... For one who has realized the Truth of Brahman, there is no more attachment to the sense-objects as before: If there is, that man has not realized his identity with Brahman, but is one whose senses are outgoing in their tendency.... Sometimes a fool, sometimes a sage, sometimes possessed of regal splendor; sometimes wandering, sometimes behaving like a motionless python, sometimes wearing a benignant expression; sometimes honored, sometimes insulted, sometimes unknown—thus lives the man of realization, ever happy with Supreme Bliss.... Satisfied with undiluted constant Bliss, he is neither grieved nor elated by sense-objects, is neither attached nor averse to them, but always disports with the Self and takes pleasure therein.[81]

The free souls demonstrate through their lives the reality of Self-Knowledge and serve as guiding lights in the path of meditation. A seeker's progress in meditation is essentially progressive advancement toward Self-Knowledge, and this advancement is marked by an ever-increasing manifestation in him of the qualities and virtues that the free souls exemplify.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

31. The Sacred Texts on Progress in Meditation

The Upanishads on Progress in Meditation

When the five instruments of knowledge stand still, together with the mind, and when the intellect does not move, that is called the Supreme State. This, the firm control of the senses, is what is called yoga. One must then be vigilant; for yoga can be both beneficial and injurious.

—*Katha Upanishad* 2.3.10–11

What is here, the same is there; and what is there, the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees any difference here.

—*Katha Upanishad* 2.1.10

A man who has discrimination for his charioteer, and holds the reins of the mind firmly, reaches the end of the road; and that is the supreme position of Vishnu.

—*Katha Upanishad* 1.3.9

Take the Upanishad as the bow, the great weapon, and place upon it the arrow sharpened by meditation. Then, having drawn it back with a mind directed to the thought of Brahman, strike that mark, O my good friend—that which is the Imperishable.

—*Mundaka Upanishad* 2.2.3

When the mind, after realizing the knowledge that Atman alone is real, becomes free from imaginations and there-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

fore does not cognize anything, for want of objects to be cognized, it ceases to be the mind.

—*MANDUKYA GAUDAPADA KARIKA* 3.32

Atman, smaller than the small, greater than the great, is hidden in the hearts of all living creatures. A man who is free from desires beholds the majesty of the Self through tranquillity of the senses and the mind and becomes free from grief.

—*KATHA UPANISHAD* 1.2.20

It is through Atman that one perceives all objects in sleep or in the waking state. Having realized the vast, all-pervading Atman, the calm soul does not grieve.

—*KATHA UPANISHAD* 2.1.4

This Atman cannot be attained by one who is without strength or earnestness or who is without knowledge accompanied by renunciation. But if a wise man strives by means of these aids, his soul enters the Abode of Brahman.

—*MUNDAKA UPANISHAD* 3.2.4

O my good friend, he who knows this Brahman—the Supreme and the Immortal, hidden in the cave of the heart—cuts asunder even here the knot of ignorance.

—*MUNDAKA UPANISHAD* 2.1.10

Brahman is not grasped by the eye, nor by speech, nor by the other senses, nor by penance or good works. A man becomes pure through serenity of intellect; thereupon, in meditation, he beholds Him who is without parts.

—*MUNDAKA UPANISHAD* 3.1.8

That World of Brahman belongs to those who realize It by means of continence *(brahmacharya)*—for them there is freedom in all the worlds.

—*CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD* 8.4.3

Not by work, nor by progeny, nor by wealth, but by renunciation some attained immortality.

—*KAIVALYA UPANISHAD*, v. 2

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The *Bhagavad Gita* on Progress in Meditation

When a man has no attachment to the objects of the senses or to works, and when he has wholly denounced his will, he is said to have attained yoga.

—*Bhagavad Gita* 6.4

The man whose mind is not under his control has no Self-knowledge and no contemplation either. Without contemplation he can have no peace; and without peace, how can he have happiness?

—*Bhagavad Gita* 2.66

He who restrains his organs of action, but continues to dwell in his mind on the objects of the senses, deludes himself and is called a hypocrite.

—*Bhagavad Gita* 3.6

As fire is concealed by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an unborn babe by the womb, so is Knowledge concealed by ignorance.

—*Bhagavad Gita* 3.38

Enveloped is Knowledge, O son of Kunti, by the insatiable fire of desire, which is the constant foe of the wise.

—*Bhagavad Gita* 3.39

Renouncing entirely all the desires born of the will, drawing back the senses from every direction by strength of mind, let a man little by little attain tranquillity with the help of the *buddhi* [discriminating faculty] armed with fortitude. Once the mind is established in the Self, he should think of nothing else.

—*Bhagavad Gita* 6.24–25

With sins destroyed, doubts dispelled, senses controlled, and devoting themselves to the welfare of all beings, the sages attain freedom in Brahman.

—*Bhagavad Gita* 5.25

Those persons who worship Me, meditating on their identity with Me and ever devoted to Me—to them I carry what

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

they lack and for them I preserve what they already have.
—*Bhagavad Gita* 9.22

Sri Ramakrishna on Progress in Meditation

In deep meditation the sense organs stop functioning; the mind does not look outward. It is like closing the gate of the outer court in a house. There are five objects of the senses: form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. They are all left outside.[1]

I cherished a desire. I said to the Mother, "O Mother, I shall be the king of the devotees." Again, this thought arose in my mind: "He who sincerely prays to God will certainly come here. He must." You see, that is what is happening now. Only people of that kind come.[2]

As long as the Kundalini remains asleep, you have not attained knowledge of God. You may be spending hours poring over books or discussing philosophy, but if you have no inner restlessness for God, you have no knowledge of Him.[3]

How long must a man continue the sandhya [formal worship]? As long as he has not developed love for God's Lotus Feet, as long as he does not shed tears and his hair does not stand on end when he repeats God's name.[4]

The nearer you approach to God, the less you reason and argue. When you attain Him, then all sounds—all reasoning and disputing—come to an end. Then you go into samadhi—sleep—into communion with God in silence.[5]

The way to realize God is through discrimination, renunciation, and yearning for Him. What kind of yearning? One should yearn for God as the cow, with yearning heart, runs after its calf.[6]

People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money. But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with a real cry.... Longing is like the rosy dawn.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.[7]

The yogi seeks to realize the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. His ideal is the union of the embodied soul and the Supreme Soul. He withdraws his mind from sense-objects and tries to concentrate it on the Paramatman. Therefore, during the first stage of his spiritual discipline, he retires into solitude and with undivided attention practises meditation in a fixed posture.[8]

How long does a man reason? So long as he has not realized God. But mere words will not do. As for myself, I clearly see that He Himself has become everything. The inner consciousness must be awakened through the grace of God. Through this awakening a man goes into samadhi. He often forgets that he has a body. He does not enjoy any talk unless it is about God. Worldly talk gives him pain. Through the awakening of the inner consciousness one realizes the All-pervading Consciousness.[9]

God is the Kalpataru, the Wish-fulfilling Tree. You will certainly get whatever you ask of Him. But you must pray standing near the Kalpataru. Only then will your prayer be fulfilled. But you must remember another thing. God knows our inner feeling. A man gets the fulfillment of the desire he cherishes while practicing sadhana. As one thinks, so one receives.[10]

God cannot be seen with these physical eyes. In the course of spiritual discipline one gets a "love body," endowed with "love eyes," "love ears," and so on. One sees God with those "love eyes." One hears the voice of God with those "love ears."[11]

While thinking of God the aspirant may feel a craving for material enjoyment. It is this craving that makes him slip from the path. In his next life he will be born with the spiritual tendencies that he failed to translate into action in his present life.[12]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

What can you achieve by mere lecturing and scholarship if you have no discrimination and dispassion? God alone is real, and all else is unreal. God alone is substance, and all else is nonentity. That is discrimination.[13]

God cannot be realized without purity of heart. One receives God's grace by subduing the passions—lust, anger, and greed. Then one sees God.[14]

First of all set up God in the shrine of your heart, and then deliver lectures as much as you like. How will the mere repetition of "Brahma" profit you if you are not imbued with discrimination and dispassion? It is the empty sound of a conch-shell.[15]

There are three classes of devotees. The lowest one says, "God is up there." That is, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says that God dwells in the heart as the "Inner Controller." But the highest devotee says: "God alone has become everything. All that we perceive is so many forms of God."[16]

At the approach of dawn the eastern horizon becomes red. Then one knows it will soon be sunrise. Likewise, if you see a person restless for God, you can be pretty certain that he hasn't long to wait for His vision.[17]

There are two characteristics of prema, ecstatic love of God. First, it makes a man forget the world. So intense is his love of God that he becomes unconscious of outer things. Second, he has no feeling of "my-ness" toward the body, which is so dear to all. He wholly gets rid of the feeling that the body is the soul.[18]

The mind is dispersed. Part of it has gone to Dacca, part to Delhi, and another part to Coochbehar. That mind is to be gathered in; it must be concentrated on one object. If you want sixteen annas' worth of cloth, then you have to pay the merchant the full sixteen annas. Yoga is not possible if there is the slightest obstacle. If there is a tiny

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

break in the telegraph-wire, then the news cannot be transmitted.[19]

There is a sign of Perfect Knowledge. Man becomes silent when It is attained. Then the "I," which may be likened to a salt doll, melts in the Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and becomes one with It. Not the slightest trace of distinction is left.[20]

Unless the mind becomes steady there cannot be yoga. It is the wind of worldliness that always disturbs the mind, which may be likened to a candle flame. If that flame doesn't flicker at all, then one is said to have attained yoga.[21]

No salvation is possible for a man as long as he has desire, as long as he hankers for worldly things.[22]

It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. The mind will take the colour you dye it with. It is like white clothes just returned from the laundry.... God cannot be known by the sense-organs or by this mind; but He can be known by the pure mind, the mind that is free from worldly desires.[23]

God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife. If one feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions, then one can attain Him.[24]

Unless a man is guileless, he cannot easily have faith in God. God is far, far away from the mind steeped in worldliness. Worldly intelligence creates many doubts and many forms of pride—pride of learning, wealth, and the rest.[25]

It is true that many things are recorded in the scriptures; but all these are useless without the direct realization of God, without devotion to His Lotus Feet, without purity of heart.[26]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Sense pleasures appear more and more tasteless as love for God grows.[27]

You will never succeed in realizing God unless your soul becomes restless for Him.... One must practice intense spiritual discipline.[28]

Discrimination is the knowledge of what is real and what is unreal. It is the realization that God alone is the real and eternal Substance and that all else is unreal, transitory, impermanent.[29]

The mind of a worldly person is, no doubt, like muddy water; but it can be made clear by a purifying agent. Discrimination and renunciation are the purifying agent.[30]

A man of true renunciation cannot enjoy anything but God. He leaves any place where people talk of worldly things; he listens only to spiritual talk. A man of true renunciation never speaks about anything but God. The bees light only on flowers, in order to sip honey; they do not enjoy anything else.[31]

God cannot be realized without love and longing. Unless one has learnt to love God, one cannot realize Him.[32]

If a devotee believes one hundred per cent that his Chosen Ideal is God, then he attains God and sees Him.[33]

After having the vision of God man is overpowered with bliss. He becomes silent. Who will speak? Who will explain?[34]

Swami Vivekananda on Progress in Meditation

Stick to your reason until you reach something higher; and you will know it to be higher because it will not jar with reason. The stage beyond consciousness is inspiration *(samadhi);* but never mistake hysterical trances for the real thing.[35]

It is impossible to find God outside ourselves. Our own souls contribute all the divinity that is outside us. We are the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

greatest temple. The objectification is only a faint imitation of what we see within ourselves.

Concentration of the powers of the mind is our only instrument to help us see God. If you know one soul—your own—you know all souls, past, present, and to come. The will concentrates the mind; certain things excite and control this will, such as reason, love, devotion, and breathing. The concentrated mind is a lamp that shows us every corner of the soul.[36]

Sri Shankaracharya on Progress in Meditation

In the forest-tract of sense-pleasures there prowls a huge tiger called the mind. Let good people who have a longing for liberation never go there.

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, v. 176

The result of dispassion is knowledge, that of knowledge is withdrawal from sense-pleasures, which leads to the experience of the Bliss of the Self, whence follows Peace.

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, v. 419

The truth of the Paramatman is extremely subtle, and cannot be reached by the gross outgoing tendency of the mind. It is only accessible to noble souls with perfectly pure minds, by means of Samadhi brought on by an extraordinary fineness of the mental state.

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, v. 360

Know, O wise man, dispassion and discrimination to be like the two wings of a bird in the case of an aspirant. Unless both are there, none can, with the help of either one, reach the creeper of liberation that grows, as it were, on the top of an edifice.

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, v. 374

The illumined sage, whose only pleasure is in the Self, ever lives at ease, whether going or staying, sitting or lying, or in any other condition.

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, v. 528.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

The stupid man thinks he is the body, the book-learned man identifies himself with the mixture of body and soul, while the sage possessed of realization due to discrimination looks upon the eternal Atman as his Self, and thinks, "I am Brahman."

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, v. 160

The yogin who has attained perfection and is liberated-in-life gets this as result—he enjoys eternal Bliss in his mind, internally as well as externally.

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, v. 418

To the man who has realized his own nature, and drinks the undiluted Bliss of the Self, there is nothing more exhilarating than the quietude that comes of a state of desirelessness.

—*VIVEKACHUDAMANI*, v. 527

The Srimad Bhagavatam on Progress in Meditation

I will now explain to you the yoga of meditation.

The first step to this yoga is the observance of the moral precepts, which must be obeyed by all. These are:

Do your duties faithfully, no matter how lowly your condition in life. Surrender the fruits of your actions to God. Seek the society of the holy and do service to them. Above all, acquire an eager thirst for righteousness, truth, and freedom.

Practice moderation in your appetites. Do injury to no creature.

Swerve not from the truth. Covet not the wealth of another.

Accept only enough for your daily needs.

Practice self-control and self-denial, that you may lead a pure, continent life. Before all else, be clean and pure in soul, mind, and body.

And finally, study the Scriptures with diligence.

To practice meditation one should select a secluded place and use it for that purpose only. When one is seated he must hold the body erect, but not tense. Then he must

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

practice control of the prana, with the help of breathing exercises. The mind must then be gathered in to itself and not permitted to dwell on external objects.

Next, the mind must be fixed on one of the centers of consciousness within the body. This final act is known as the practice of concentration.

Thus prepared, one should meditate on the divine attributes.

Through these practices will come remarkable spiritual growth. By the practice of pranayama you may acquire physical health. As you practice pratyahara you will cease to be attached to external objects. Practice of concentration will bring you purity of heart, and meditation will enable you to unite yourself with the divine.

Thus, when your mind and heart become calm and pure, you will learn to dwell in the consciousness of God. Then will you find divine love.[37]

The *Uddhava Gita* on Progress in Meditation

Sitting on an even seat at ease[1] with the body erect, placing the hands on the lap and with the eyes directed towards the tip of the nose,[2] one should purify the passage of prana[3] by means of inhalation, retention, and exhalation of the breath,[4] and should also practise slowly in the inverse order, with the senses under control.[5]

Raising the syllable Om to the heart by means of pranayama,[6] one should add to it the vowel. The Om is like

1. The Lord does not prescribe any particular posture; according to Patanjali also, posture must only be "steady and pleasant."
2. This helps concentration.
3. The nadis or nerves. Prana is the vital principle, the very source of all motion in the body, not to be confounded with breath, which is only an external manifestation.
4. This is pranayama, or regulating the pranas.
5. Not allowing them to run to the sense-objects. This is pratyahara.
6. This and the next verse recommend the repetition of the sacred syllable Om along with the pranayama.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the continuous peal of a bell,[7] and extending in a thin line like a thread in a lotus stalk.

Thus one should practise the pranayama coupled with Om, ten times, thrice daily. Within a month one will then control the prana.

Within the body there is the lotus of the heart,[8] with its stalk above and point below, and with eight petals and a pericarp.[9]

One should meditate on this as inverted with the flower upwards and opened, and in the pericarp should think of the sun, moon, and fire, one within the other. In the fire, again, one should reflect on the following form of Mine[10] which is good for meditation....

Charity, the performance of one's duty, the observance of vows, general and particular, the hearing of the scriptures, meritorious acts, and all other works—all these culminate in the control of the mind. The control of the mind is the highest yoga.

Say of what use are charity and the rest to one whose mind is controlled and pacified? Of what use, again, are this charity and the rest to one whose mind is restless or lapsing into dullness?[38]

---

7. The reference is to the Anahata sound, which is continually rising up from the region of the navel and which only yogis hear.
8. The nerve plexus in the spine corresponding to the heart.
9. This is the position of the "lotus" before meditation, and it is also a bud. When meditating, one should think of this as pointing upward and full-blown. It is interesting to note that Sri Ramakrishna, during his sadhana period, actually saw these things taking place, and the lotus remained in its new posture. All true yogis probably have this experience.
10. The Lord's.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Part Six

Obstacles in Meditation

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

32. Obstacles in Meditation and Ways of Overcoming Them

There are many obstacles that beset the practice of meditation. In this practice the aspirant moves inward, journeying alone through the layers of his consciousness, and his only companion in this journey is his mind. From the point of view of the six centers of consciousness, the journey is also moving upward from the lower centers to the higher ones. It is inward in the sense that the aspirant journeys through the states of wakefulness, dream and memories, and dreamless sleep, to reach eventually the fourth state, where the true Self shines.

The obstacles are due to the resistance of the body and to bodily habits, to the mind and its deep-rooted *samskaras,* or tendencies, and to the intellect and its nondiscrimination between delusion and reality. The obstacles assume many forms and wear many disguises, gross and subtle, and shift their gears from the physical level to the mental level, and from the mental level to the spiritual level. The aspirant desirous of reaching the goal must prepare to face the obstacles and know the ways of overcoming them. Almost all the obstacles arise from within. They are the results of accumulated deposits of past indulgent living, created by our delusions and desires. No one but ourselves can clear these obstacles that stand in our way.

Obstacles in Meditation Enumerated by Patanjali

According to the *Yoga Aphorisms* of Patanjali, the obstacles in meditation are (1) disease, (2) mental inertia, (3) doubt, (4) delusion, (5)

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

sloth, (6) craving for sense enjoyment, (7) false perception, (8) failure in concentration, and (9) falling away from concentration.

Disease

Sickness of the body is a great hindrance to the practice of meditation. It draws the mind again and again to the physical level and makes it difficult to move toward concentration. Good health is an indispensable necessity for the practice of meditation. The body and the mind are closely related to each other, so that sickness of the body makes the mind incapacitated to a great extent. There can be no concentration whatsoever so long as the body, because of its ill health, is unable to cooperate with the efforts of the aspirant.

Unless chronic or pathological, the sickness of the body is caused by impure and immoderate diet, lack of control over the gross urges, lack of regular exercise, and overwork. The suggested remedies for this obstacle are a pure and wholesome diet and moderation in eating, recreation, rest, and conservation of energy. With regard to pure diet, the *Bhagavad Gita* maintains the following:

> Food that promotes longevity, vitality, strength, health, pleasure, appetite, and that is succulent, oleaginous, substantial, and agreeable, is favoured by people endowed with sattva.[1]

Diet should be simple, bland, light, wholesome, and nutritious. Barley, wheat, clarified butter, milk, and almonds promote longevity and increase power and strength. Regarding milk, cow's milk is the best. Swami Turiyananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, said:

> I do not like buffalo's milk. It increases fat. Cow's milk is the best. Yudhisthira was fond of cow's milk from childhood, and Duryodhana of buffalo's milk; and you see the difference in their nature.[2]

Foods that are to be avoided are spicy dishes, sweets, onion, garlic, meat, salt, chilies, and condiments. It is said that meat can make a man a scientist but rarely a yogi. Salt excites passion and depletes willpower. The *Bhagavad Gita* further points out:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> For him who is temperate in his food and recreation, temperate in his exertion at work, and temperate in sleep and waking, yoga puts an end to all sorrows.[3]

According to the books on Yoga, the aspirant should fill half his stomach with food and one quarter with water, and leave one quarter for the movement of air.[4] Food, according to Shankaracharya, is not just what one eats; anything that is drawn in by the sense organs is also considered food, and therefore the aspirant is required to observe purity with regard to all the sense organs.

The next requirements for good health are exercise and conservation of energy. Regular exercise is very helpful for health. Conservation of energy calls for giving up of vulgar pleasures and for control over gross impulses. Besides diet, the Yoga system advocates the practice of *asanas* or *hatha yoga* exercises and the control of breath *(pranayama)* to achieve the goal of good health.

Mental Inertia

Mental inertia is due to the preponderance of *tamas*, or inertia of the mind. Under such circumstances, the mind is unwilling to stir. This is caused by the absence of any definite purpose of life and a lack of resolution of the mind. As a remedy for this obstacle, Swami Brahmananda says the following:

> It is the nature of the mind to rebel against effort and to always seek comforts. If you want to achieve something you will have to work hard. In the preliminary stage in order to cultivate a strong habit, you must force your mind to meditate. If you find it difficult to sit for long hours, lie down on your bed and practice japam. If you feel sleepy, walk and repeat the mantram. In this way the habit will be formed. Never give up your sadhana. You must wage war against the mind. To bring the mind under control is the goal of spiritual disciplines.[5]

Mental inertia is overcome by right discrimination about diet, regulation of sleep, and determined resolution to practice meditation. In this regard Swami Brahmananda's guidelines are the following:

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> During sadhana it is better to have a little discrimination about food. Some kinds of food increase sleepiness and should be avoided. It is not good to eat too many sweets, sour pickles, or urad lentils. These foods increase tamas in the body, which means more laziness and more sleep. It is almost impossible for a man of tamasic nature to practice sadhana. Eat that food which is easily digestible. Never fill your stomach more than two-thirds with food. This will increase your strength and energy. If you overload your stomach, most of your energy will be consumed in digesting the food. Moreover, gas will form in the abdomen, and this will make you uncomfortable. But this will not happen if one third of your stomach is empty. A healthy body is very helpful for sadhana.[6]

The *Bhagavad Gita* says, regarding food and sleep:

> Yoga is not for him who eats too much nor for him who eats too little. It is not for him, O Arjuna, who sleeps too much nor for him who sleeps too little.[7]

According to another view, five things are indispensable for success in meditation: the practice of silence, a light diet of milk and fruits, living in solitude, personal contact with the teacher, and a cool place. Concentration and meditation should be practiced with an empty stomach, empty bladder, and empty colon, and a salt-free diet is immensely helpful in that regard.

Regarding the rules about food, the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi says:

> The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] was very particular about one thing in regard to food. He used to forbid all the devotees from eating the food of the Sraddha [funeral] ceremony. He used to say that it injured one's devotion. Apart from this you may eat whatever you like, but remember the Master when you do so.[8]

On the necessity of nourishing food, the following is mentioned by Swami Vivekananda:

> One day a young man brought to me in the house of Mohini Babu at Dacca, a photograph and said, "Sir, please

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

tell me who he is. Is he an Avatara?" I told him gently many times that I knew nothing of it. When even on my telling him three or four times the boy did not cease from his persistent questioning, I was constrained to say at last: "My boy, henceforward take a little nutritious food and then your brain will develop. Without nourishing food, I see your brain has dried up." At these words the young man may have been much displeased. But what could I do? Unless I spoke like this to the boys, they would turn into madcaps by degrees.[9]

Swami Saradananda gives the following rules:

You have asked me whether vegetarianism is absolutely necessary for leading a spiritual life. My answer is that no hard and fast rule can be made with regard to food. Can we live without doing harm to some form of life? Do you think plants and vegetables have no life? Our scriptures say they have; science has proven it. If you preserve the strength and vigor of your body and mind while living on vegetarian food, you are at liberty to do so. But if, while forgoing fish and meat, your health deteriorates, you must give up such ideas and take a more moderate stand. As a general rule, when the body becomes weak, the mind is weakened also. A weak mind is unfit for meditation. When a man with such a mind tries to meditate, his mind runs away. It is only a strong person with sufficient will power who can concentrate and fix his mind on God. Therefore, you must not do anything that will impair your spiritual life. Whatever you eat, make it an offering to the Lord. You are to think that God resides in the body in the form of fire and that the food you eat is given as an oblation to the fire. At His command you are performing an internal sacrifice ceremony. By these thoughts the physical act of eating will be consecrated into a ritual and your scruples about injury to animals will be avoided. But to keep this attitude in the mind is not an easy matter. It needs regular practice and right-mindedness. It is for this reason that monks in India make a firm resolve not to take meals without reciting the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

following verse from the Gita: "Brahman is the ritual, Brahman is the offering, Brahman is he who offers to the fire that is Brahman. If a mind sees Brahman in every action, he will find Brahman."[10]

The object of food is to build a strong body and a fine intellect. Unless the body and the mind are pure it is not possible to do spiritual practices. It is the food offered to God that builds a pure body and mind. The *shraddha* food is offered to the *manes* and not to God, and as a result, instead of building a pure mind and body, it affects people otherwise. Food builds the body and the mind, and the nature of the food also affects them. In Chaitanya's life we have a case where an ordinary man who happened to touch him in a state of ecstasy was also overpowered by religious emotions. He was told to take *shraddha* food to get over these emotions, and as a matter of fact this food did put an end to that person's ecstatic moods.[11]

Manu gives the following rules about food and eating:

For facing east he eats food that gives long life; south, fame; west, good fortune; north, truth. A twice-born man should always eat food with a concentrated mind, after he has washed; and when he has eaten he should wash thoroughly, and wash out the orifices of his body with water.... He should not give the leftovers to anyone, nor should he eat between meals; he should not overeat, nor go anywhere with food still on his mouth and hands. Overeating is not conducive to health, long life, or heaven; it destroys merit and people hate it; therefore it should be avoided.[12]

Doubt

Doubts of various kinds arise in the mind of the aspirant when there is no clearly defined goal for him to attain and no standard by which he can judge and measure his progress. Whenever the aspirant meets with an obstacle, he begins to doubt whether he is following the right method and whether his subject of meditation is proper. Doubts are caused by the impurities of the mind, which exert resis-

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

tance from the subconscious level. The aspirant cannot avoid doubt in the early stages and must wrestle with it with positive resignation and discrimination until he has tasted the inner bliss of meditation to some extent. Doubts are of three kinds: about the certainty of the result, about the impossibility of the result, and contrary thoughts. Holy company and hearing of the sacred texts remove the first kind of doubt; reflection and discrimination, the second kind; and rigorous meditation, the third kind. Along with these, Patanjali advises concentration upon a single subject; that is, the aspirant is advised to concentrate on his Ishtam to the exclusion of all other things.

Delusion

Delusion is a lack of reflection upon the means of attaining concentration. It is not doubt about the object of knowledge, but the aspirant may not be following the right means to attain the goal. The aspirant may overemphasize or oversimplify one or more steps toward meditation. He may be following the practice but ignoring the aspect of regularity. A dream experience may be taken as a spiritual experience, a temporary thrill may be regarded as progress, and attachment may pass for duty. Delusion is overcome by loyalty to the prescribed rules of practice, to the teaching, and to reflection.

Sloth

Under the influence of sloth, the mind is unable to stir, as distinguished from "unwilling" to stir, as in the case of mental laziness. Sloth is often due to some defect of the mind caused by an inadequate supply of energy. In order to overcome this condition of sloth, the aspirant is advised to summon his will, comply with the laws of good health, and persist in his practice, no matter how uninteresting or mechanical such practice may be. Only the stern will of an ascetic can overcome sloth.

Craving for Sense Enjoyment

Craving for sense enjoyment arises in the mind of an aspirant practicing meditation. This is due to the resistance of the subconscious part of the mind. As the mind begins to rise to the upper levels of consciousness, the drags of the subconscious begin to become more intense. Through meditation, holy thoughts are poured into

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

the mind and go deep down into the subconscious level, and contrary thoughts that were lying in the core of the subconscious come to the surface. *Samskaras* of worldly desires cannot be rationalized, forgotten, or ignored. They must be neutralized by cultivating counter-*samskaras*.

The remedy for such craving for sense enjoyment is to cultivate dispassion, by which the aspirant is able to see the evil effects of sense enjoyment and to devote more time regularly in the practice of *japa* and meditation. By continuity and regularity of practice, a new *samskara* is created and the aspirant begins to get a taste of inner bliss. Only by tasting inner bliss can one overcome the craving for sense pleasure. Until then, the aspirant is advised to keep the objects of enjoyment at a distance by the practices of discrimination and sense-control. This struggle to overcome the craving for sense enjoyment is the only true worship of the Lord. Craving for sense enjoyment clouds the mind and prevents the aspirant from visualizing the Ishtam within.

False Perception

An aspirant practicing meditation is often deluded by his own mind. He may take a thing for what it is not. He may take a temporary emotional thrill for a spiritual experience. He may imagine that he sees light or hears sounds during meditation because of his heightened thinking. He may get entangled in some spurious experiences of a psychic nature, lose sight of the goal, and be sidetracked. The cause of such false perception is lack of discrimination and reflection. Success in meditation is not measured by dream experiences, emotional excitement, or psychic attainments. The aspirant must understand that a dream is a dream, not a reality, and that emotions rise and fall. A tangible attainment is to be measured in terms of transformation of character.

The suggested remedy for false perception is heightening of the spirit of dispassion and sharpening of discriminatory thinking. The aspirant must go forward and not be satisfied with taking something as everything. A true spiritual realization carries its own credentials. It silences doubt and strengthens faith. Any phenomenon that does not fulfill these two conditions must be taken as temporary and short-lived.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Failure in Concentration

It has been found that in spite of right resolution and clear understanding of the goal, an aspirant fails to attain a particular level of concentration. This failure is due to hidden contrary tendencies and attachments of the subconscious mind known as *samskaras. Samskaras* are the seeds of past indulgent living. They do not die of themselves. As an aspirant practices concentration and meditation, they begin to appear on the surface level and drag his mind down.

As a remedy, the aspirant must cultivate counter-*samskaras* by the regularity of meditation. The uninterrupted practice of meditation on one subject, consciously and regularly, helps develop a counter-*samskara.* This counter-*samskara* of a single thought-wave, through repeated practice over a long period, neutralizes all contrary *samskaras* of the mind.

Falling Away from Concentration

The aspirant practicing meditation may gain a certain level of concentration, but soon it may be lost. This may happen because of a lack of effort to advance further. In the journey toward the goal, if you do not proceed you will recede. If one fails to make progress, then he runs the risk of regress. It is necessary not merely to make a gain, but also to attain stability in that gain. The remedy for this obstacle is unrelenting effort and continuity of practice, however unpleasant and distasteful that practice may be.

The nine obstacles, as itemized by Patanjali, are of specific nature in regard to the practice of concentration, meditation, and *samadhi.* Besides these, there can be other obstacles, such as attachment to objects, persons, or ideas; weakness of the mind and defects of the character, especially related to the lack of mastery over the ground rules of *yama* and *niyama.*

The enumerated nine obstacles bring in their wake four disturbances: (1) grief, (2) mental distress, (3) restlessness of the body, and (4) irregular breathing. Grief is that which upsets the mind. It may ensue either from disharmony of the physical condition or from inner conflict due to opposing desires. When grief is combined with the feeling of incapacity, attempting to remove grief leads to despair and despondency. The upsetting of the equilibrium, whether of the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

body or of the mind, results in restlessness within, and that restlessness is manifested in the disequilibrium of breathing. To remedy these four obstacles, Patanjali suggests the following: (1) repetition of the sacred word Om and self-surrender to the Lord; (2) keeping on with the practice of meditation; (3) concentration on only the Ishtam, to the exclusion of all other things; (4) being happy in the happiness of all; (5) being merciful to those who are in misery; (6) feeling friendship for all and being indifferent to the wicked; (7) regular practice of *pranayama* or control of breath; and (8) practice of concentration, which brings extraordinary sense perceptions. As Swami Vivekananda observes:

> The yogis say that if the mind is concentrated on the tip of the nose, after a few days one begins to smell wonderful perfumes. If it is concentrated on the root of the tongue, one begins to hear sounds; if on the tip of the tongue, one begins to taste wonderful flavours; if on the middle of the tongue, one feels as if one were coming in contact with some object. If one concentrates the mind on the palate one begins to see strange things. If a man whose mind is disturbed wants to take up some of these practices of yoga, yet doubts the truth of them, he will have his doubts set at rest when, after a little practice, these things come to him, and he will persevere.[13]

Concentration may be practiced on the effulgent light, which is beyond all sorrow:

> Think of the lotus of the heart, with petals downward, and running through it, the Sushumna. Take in the breath, and while expelling it imagine that the petals are turned upward and that inside the lotus is an effulgent light. Meditate on that.[14]

Or on the heart that has given up all attachment to sense objects:

> Take some holy person, some great person whom you revere, some saint whom you know to be perfectly non-attached. Meditate on that heart and it will calm the mind.[15]

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Or on the knowledge that comes in dreams or the happiness experienced in deep sleep:

> Sometimes a man dreams that he sees angels and talks to them, and that he is in an ecstatic condition and hears music floating through the air. All this makes a deep impression on him when he awakes. Let him think of that dream as real and meditate upon it.[16]

Or on anything that is spiritually uplifting.

Obstacles in Meditation Enumerated in the Vedanta Texts

For those practicing meditation, Vedanta teaches about four great obstacles: (1) *laya*, (2) *vikshepa*, (3) *kashaya*, and (4) *rasaswada*.

Laya

The first of them is torpidity, which is lapsing into a state of sleep called *laya*. *Laya* is a kind of stagnation, under the influence of which the aspirant feels disinclined to make fresh efforts. It is a kind of mental sleep generated by a condition of inertia in the system. It is to be overcome by vigorous practices of concentration and self-exertion, and by moderation in the ways of living. The *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* says:

> Incomplete sleep, indigestion, overeating, and physical exertion are the causes of inactivity *(laya)*.... He should eat easily digestible food sparingly, avoiding labour, desireless and without exertion should always sit in a place which is solitary and free from disturbances; or he should control the vital breath in the way he is accustomed to do.[17]

Vikshepa

The second obstacle is *vikshepa*, a condition of the mind when it is troubled by old thoughts, old memories, and old tendencies. *Vikshepa* can make an aspirant abandon spiritual practice or become irregular in it. The distractions caused by *vikshepa* become intense when the aspirant summons his will to concentrate in a conscious way. When the good thoughts of the mind combine, the contrary

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

thoughts also combine to give joint resistance. This reaction of the mind is mechanical. A worldly thought, when repeated, turns into a tendency. Tendencies, becoming ingrained, recur, following the old rut they created earlier. They do not go away of themselves. They cannot be uprooted by rational thinking. The aspirant needs patience and forbearance to overcome them, by developing countertendencies. The recurrence of the old tendencies only proves that a part of the mind still entertains those tendencies and repeatedly pampers them. They need to be overcome slowly and gradually. A screw driven into a wall with thirty turns requires an opposite thirty turns to get it out. Repeated practice of concentration backed by thoughts of dispassion and discrimination is the only way to overcome this obstacle.

Kashaya

The third obstacle is called *kashaya.* The mind under this condition is suddenly seized by a violent attachment to a long-forgotten experience of sense enjoyment. The memory suddenly resurrects from the subconscious depths and agitates the aspirant like a gust of wind. The obstacle of *kashaya* is to be overcome by detachment and discrimination.

Rasaswada

The fourth obstacle is enjoyment of inferior bliss, known as *rasaswada.* As the aspirant progresses in the practice of meditation, he may experience spiritual emotions, the lower stages of internal bliss. Some days his mind may rise to the upper centers of consciousness and feel uplifted. But all these experiences can prevent the aspirant from moving forward. He may be tempted to take such experiences as the real thing and be deluded thereby.

Under such circumstances, the aspirant must not dwell on any exaltation, ecstasy, or emotion, but instead he must invoke the spirit of dispassion and discrimination. Shankaracharya in his *Aparokshanubhuti* (Self-Realization) describes the following:

> While practicing Samadhi there appear unavoidably many obstacles, such as lack of inquiry, idleness, desire for sense-pleasure, sleep, dullness, distraction, tasting of joy, and the

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

sense of blankness. One desiring the knowledge of Brahman should slowly get rid of such innumerable obstacles.

For those whose mind is completely purified this (Raja-Yoga) alone is productive of perfection. Purity of mind, again, is speedily accessible to those who are devoted to the teacher and the Deity.[18]

Obstacles in Meditation and Their Roots

Almost all the obstacles enumerated by the Yoga system and the Vedanta texts have their roots in violations of the foundational practices. The foundational practices in Yoga are known as *yama* and *niyama*. The virtues of *yama* are five restraints: (1) nonviolence, (2) truthfulness, (3) noncovetousness, (4) continence, and (5) nonreceiving of gifts and favors. The virtues of *niyama* are five observances: (1) internal and external purification, (2) contentment, (3) mortification, (4) study of the sacred texts, and (5) worship of the Divine. The foundational virtues according to Vedanta are four: (1) discrimination between the Real and the unreal; (2) dispassion; (3) practice of the six treasures (calmness, self-control, self-settledness, forbearance, complete concentration, and faith); and (4) intense longing. The foundational virtues described above are to be practiced under all conditions and in thought, word, and deed.

Success in the foundational practices endows the aspirant with a steel-frame moral foundation that alone can help the aspirant overcome the obstacles, whether physical or mental. Success in the regulatory practices—that is, concentration and meditation—is proportional to the success in and mastery over the foundational virtues. The essence of the foundational virtues is self-mastery, and the essence of self-mastery is mastery over the urges of lust and greed. All other obstacles are the various ramifications of these two. Treading the path to Self-Knowledge or Self-Realization is like mountain climbing. One climbing a mountain continues to breathe the same air, but in its more and more rarefied forms. In the same way, the seeker continues to encounter the same two obstacles, but in their subtler and subtler forms. Shankaracharya in his *Vivekachudamani* says:

The shark of hankering catches by the throat those seekers after liberation who have got only an apparent dispassion

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

(vairagya) and are trying to cross the ocean of *samsara* (relative existence), and violently snatching them away, drowns them half-way....

Whoever seeks to realise the Self by devoting himself to the nourishment of the body proceeds to cross a river by catching hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log.[19]

The *Uddhava Gita*, or The Last Message of Shri Krishna, says:

When the mind, in the act of being concentrated, begins immediately to wander and is unsteady, then being alert he should bring it within his control by following a conciliatory way.

He should not lose sight of the course of his mind, but holding his prana and sense-organs in subjugation, he should bring the mind under his control by means of an intellect charged with sattva.

This sort of control of the mind is spoken of as the highest Yoga—like the control of an unruly horse with a view to making him conform to his rider's wishes at every step....

Should the body of a Yogi who is but practising Yoga and is not yet an adept in it, be overtaken by troubles that may have cropped up in the course of it, then the following remedies are prescribed.

Some of these troubles he should burn up through Yogic concentration, some through postures coupled with retention of the breath, and some through austerities, mantras, and medicines.

Some evils he should slowly kill through meditation on Me and the chanting of My name, etc., and some through service unto the great Masters of Yoga.

There are some strong-willed people who by various means first make the body very strong and of undecaying youth, and then practise Yoga with a view to acquiring extraordinary powers.

But that is not praised by the wise, for such effort is useless, since the body is mortal, like the fruits of a tree....

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

> The Yogi who practises this Yoga, relying solely on Me and having no desires, is not thwarted by obstacles and experiences the bliss of the Self.[20]

Again, Shankaracharya says:

> The result of dispassion is knowledge, that of knowledge is withdrawal from sense-pleasures, which leads to the experience of the Bliss of the Self, whence follows Peace.
>
> If there is an absence of the succeeding stages, the preceding ones are futile. (When the series is perfect) the cessation of the objective world, extreme satisfaction, and matchless bliss follow as a matter of course.[21]

The Yoga system classifies aspirants into three broad categories, in terms of moral fitness: mild, medium, and intense. Again, each category has been subdivided into three. So there are aspirants who are mild-mild, medium-mild, intense-mild; mild-medium, medium-medium, intense-medium; mild-intense, medium-intense, intense-intense. Success comes for those who are intensely intense in their foundational virtues.

The Yoga system asks for forcible practice of self-mastery. The arguments of the Yoga system are the following. The logic of the Yoga way maintains that the mind is material, and its conditionings of impurities are mechanical. Reason, it says, is too weak to overcome the perverted mind. Devotion to God is most often passive. Prayer and worship call for strong faith in God. Furthermore, it is most difficult to know the nature, depth, and extent of the impurities. All that we know is that the mind is restless and turbulent, and that restlessness is manifesting itself in our bodily movement, the unevenness of our breath, and changes in our biochemistry. The mind never becomes controlled unless we control it. Hence the control must be forcible, and to that end the Yoga system prescribes the eightfold practice: *yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana,* and *samadhi.* The first five are external practices, the last three internal. The Yoga system asks for the rise of the whole mind in order to overcome the obstacles, for relentless effort and unwavering determination and willpower to accomplish the task. Educating the mind to give up its old ways is a slow process.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Auspicious desires are not always forthcoming. The journey to the goal is never completed unless we hasten our steps.

The Yoga system relies more on the practical aspect, as distinguished from the aspect of dispassion. Patanjali refers to dispassion as a complementary means for the control of the mind. It seeks to develop reason through the training and exercise of willpower. The Yoga system seeks to arouse and modify our subconscious mind indirectly through the help of regulation of breath, posture, and diet. Modern psychology explains how the conscious mind is modified and controlled by the subconscious, but the Yoga system further shows us how we can modify the subconscious mind by the conscious, how repeated exercises of the will on the conscious level can influence the subconscious depths and modify them permanently. By controlling and disciplining the manifested effects of impurities, the Yoga system seeks to go to the root of all impurities and overcome them. It maintains that the ocean of the mind is always turbulent. If you want to take a dip in the ocean, do not wait for the weather to change and the ocean to become calm. You must plunge into the ocean by learning to handle the waves.

The Yoga system further mentions that our spiritual consciousness is in deep slumber in the base of the spine. It must rise to the upper centers of consciousness. For that to happen, the blockage in the *sushumna* canal in our spine must be cleared. The Yoga system prefers dredging the canal rather than dissolving the blockage. Posture, diet, and *pranayama* are the means to dredge. Conversion of energy into *ojas* provides the sustained strength to dredge.

The manifestation of Yoga powers generates confidence in the mind of the yogi as to the infallibility of the Yoga, and thus encourages him in his task of attaining the goal. Reason can never uproot the miseries and dispel ignorance, because, working on the surface level of consciousness, it cannot overcome the permanent deposits of *samskaras* of the mind. To accomplish that task, the whole person in all his dimensions—physical, vital, mental, and spiritual—must rise up and fight against the permanent tendencies of the mind that block the way. The Yoga system is suited to those in whom reason has not yet established its natural supremacy.

The Vedanta system seeks gradual control and outlines the following reasons. Vedanta maintains that the impure mind cannot

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

be made pure by working the reverse way: it seeks to educate and discipline the intellect in order to overcome the mind and the body, rather than disciplining the mind and the body for the purpose of educating the intellect. It relies more on the practice of dispassion and believes that the master urge in all of us is the need to move toward the Divine. Spiritual longing, it says, cannot be generated by diet, posture, *pranayama,* and so forth. Withdrawal of the mind is not possible unless the mind cooperates in the process. Forcible control can rouse the mind in an untimely manner, before spiritual longing has come and before the spiritual motivation for making the journey has become sufficiently strong. A roused mind without much longing for the goal can be self-destructive. Through spiritual practices of prayer, contemplation, and worship, we build spiritual platforms as the mind begins to move upward. These platforms keep the mind from falling headlong into the lower centers of consciousness. Vedanta believes in gradual control, so that the mind does not rebel. Its process is the way of least resistance. Perhaps it is slow, but it is sure and tested.

Regarding control of the mind, a Vedanta scripture says:

> Vasistha has properly described the reasoning (yoga) which leads to dissolution of the mind; and who applies them controls the mind.
>
> It is held that control over the mind is obtained either by hathayoga or by reasoning. By exercising forced control over the seats of the knowledge- and action-organs, a hold of sorts on them sometimes occurs, which leads to the dissolution of the mind.
>
> Study of the knowledge of the supreme Self, association with the good, total renunciation of desires, control of vital energy—these are, as is well known, the perfect means to conquer the mind.
>
> Those who apply hathayoga to control the mind while such effective means are available, are like those who abandoning the lamp apply magic ointment to their eyes to dispel darkness.[22]

Yama of Vedanta is restraint of all the senses by thinking "all this is Brahman." The continuous flow of this one kind of thought is

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

called *yama*. Giving up of the illusory universe of multiplicity by knowing it as Brahman is true renunciation. The practice of silence is not restraint of the speech, but dwelling on Brahman. Solitude is interior, not external. Real posture is that in which the mind flows toward Brahman spontaneously. Absorption in Brahman is true equipoise. The blessed vision is directing the mind to the Knowledge of Brahman, not fixing the mind on the tip of the nose. *Rechaka* of *pranayama* is breathing out the thought that is not-Self; *puraka* is breathing in the thought of the Self; and steadiness of thought thereafter is called *kumbhaka*. Those who do not know this only torture their nose.

Absorption of the mind in Atman, knowing that It alone abides, is called true withdrawal. Steadiness in dwelling on Brahman is concentration. Constant awareness of the fact that my true Self is verily Brahman is called meditation. All obstacles on the way are overcome only by dissolving the mind in the ocean of the Infinite Self. By thinking of an object, the mind gets identified with it; by thinking of a void, it really becomes blank; but by thinking of Brahman, it attains to perfection. Those who give up this supremely purifying thought of Brahman live in vain and are of the same level with beasts. Those who try to control the mind through posture, breath, diet, and other physical means are like those who hope to empty the ocean by taking away water from it drop by drop with a blade of *kusha* grass.

The goal of Self-Knowledge in Vedanta is not just release from the world of matter, but direct realization of the fact that all beings and things that are visible and perceptible are nothing but Brahman. Meditation is not needed for one who knows Brahman, and again it is not possible for one who does not aspire after Brahman. To attain Knowledge, what is needed is to remove ignorance, the root cause, not to overcome *samskaras*, habits, and tendencies, all of which are numerous branches shooting forth from that root. Vedanta asks the aspirant to go to the root of the matter and confront the problem.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Notes

Please see the bibliography for complete facts of publication for works cited.

Chapter 1: The Meaning of Meditation

1. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 7.6.1, in Swami Nikhilananda (trans.), *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, p. 344.
2. Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, v. 68, p. 171.
3. Quoted ibid., p. 172.
4. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.34, in Swami Nikhilananda (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita*, p. 172.
5. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, v. 176, p. 68.
6. See *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 608–9.
7. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.4–36, pp. 162–73.
8. Ibid., 2.66, p. 98.
9. Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, v. 42, p. 153.
10. Ibid., p. 1.
11. From William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, quoted in Swami Yatiswarananda, *Adventures in Religious Life* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1969), pp. 97–98.

Chapter 2: The Meditative State

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 850.
2. For this and following ideas regarding meditation, see "Meditation Techniques in Hinduism: A Survey," in *The Vedanta Kesari* (June 1992), pp. 218–20. Published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, India.
3. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.19, p. 167.
4. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 3.2.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

5. See *Uddhava Gita* (the eleventh book of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*) 9.27 and 45, translated by Swami Madhavananda, pp. 134 and 139.
6. See *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, translated by Swami Tyagisananda, p. 126.
7. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 465.
8. Ibid., p. 604.
9. Ibid., p. 745.
10. Quoted In T. M. P. Mahadevan, *On the Philosophy of Advaita* (New Delhi: Gulab Vazirani for Arnold Heinemann Publishers, 1976), p. 267.
11. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 150–51.
12. Quoted in Swami Nikhilananda, *Man in Search of Immortality*, p. 66.
13. Ibid., pp. 66–67.
14. Matthew 6:10.

Chapter 3: The Goal of Meditation

1. Matthew 13:46.
2. *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 157.
3. *Bhagavad Gita* 5.20–23, pp. 167–68.
4. Quoted in Swami Nikhilananda, *Man in Search of Immortality*, p. 26.
5. *Katha Upanishad* 2.2.10, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 165.
6. *Katha Upanishad* 2.3.2, p. 181.
7. *Katha Upanishad* 2.2.12, p. 175.
8. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 545–46.

Chapter 4: The Benefits of Meditation

1. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, v. 54, p. 20.
2. See *Bhagavad Gita* 2.66, p. 98.
3. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.13. Quoted in Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, p. 223.
4. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 609–10.

Chapter 5: Meditation in the System of Yoga

1. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.2.
2. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 3.2–3.
3. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, pp. 113–16.

Chapter 6: Meditation in Vedanta

1. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, v. 6, p. 3.
2. Ibid., v. 56, p. 20.
3. *Uddhava Gita* 18.46–47, p. 282.
4. Swami Nikhilananda, introduction to his translation of Shankaracharya's *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 99–100.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

5. See *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.3.9, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 3, p. 104.
6. Quoted in Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, pp. 123–24.
7. *Panchadasi of Vidyaranya*, 9.14–16 and 23, pp. 409–10 and 413.
8. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 255, 262, and 263, pp. 99 and 102.
9. *Mundaka Upanishad* 2.2.3–4, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 289–90.
10. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 1.14, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 85.
11. In Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 217.
12. *Bhagavad Gita* 5.8–9, p. 150.
13. *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.12–13, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 154–55.
14. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.18.1.
15. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.19.1.
16. *Bhagavad Gita* 10.17.
17. *Bhagavad Gita* 10.19–42.
18. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10.
19. See *Panchadasi of Vidyaranya*, p. 294n.
20. Quoted in Swami Nikhilananda, *Hinduism: Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit*, p. 174.
21. *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 138–41.
22. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 192.

Chapter 7: The Sacred Texts on Meditation

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 745.
2. Ibid., p. 850.
3. Ibid., p. 657.
4. Ibid., p. 81.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 745.
7. Ibid., p. 465.
8. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, pp. 48–49.
9. Ibid., p. 52.
10. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 616.
11. *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 3.
12. Ibid., p. 43.
13. Ibid., pp. 77–78.
14. Ibid., p. 205.
15. Ibid., pp. 207–8.
16. Ibid., p. 208.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 209.
19. Ibid., p. 295.
20. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 95.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

21. See *The Vedanta Kesari* (February 1992), p. 76. Published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, India.
22. Ibid., p. 26.
23. See *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 693–94.
24. See *The Vedanta Kesari* (February 1992), p. 76.
25. "Samkhya Philosophy," 3.29–32, 36 and 4. 13–15, 19, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 691–92.

Chapter 8: The Three Key Factors in All Meditation

1. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 426–27.
2. *Bhagavad Gita* 5.36, p. 173.
3. *Katha Upanishad* 2.3.10–11, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 184–85.

Chapter 9: Objects of Meditation in Yoga and Vedanta

1. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.36–39.

Chapter 10: Meditation on a Divine Form

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 4, pp. 51–56.
2. Ibid., pp. 56 and 57.
3. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 380–81.

Chapter 11: Meditation on a Divine Incarnation

1. *Bhagavad Gita* 4.6–8, pp. 125–26.
2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 725.
3. Ibid., p. 189.
4. Ibid., p. 257.
5. Ibid., p. 359.
6. Ibid., p. 361.
7. Ibid., p. 760.
8. Ibid., p. 767.
9. Ibid., p. 883.
10. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 420.
11. Ibid., p. 421.
12. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 3, p. 251.
13. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 815–16.
14. Ibid., p. 421.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Chapter 12: Meditation on the Lord as Inmost Self and Supreme Teacher

1. *Bhagavad Gita* 12.5, p. 273.
2. *Manu Smriti* 12.122–23, in *Manu-Smriti*, translated by Ganganatha Jha (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, n.d.), p. 653.
3. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 4.1, in Swami Yatiswarananda (trans.), *Universal Prayers*, p. 69.
4. *Katha Upanishad* 1.2.20, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 141.
5. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 3.7.15, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 3, p. 226.
6. *Maitrayani Upanishad* 4.15, in Yatiswarananda, *Universal Prayers*, p. 73.
7. *Yogashikha Upanishad* 6.20, ibid., p. 75.
8. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* 12.16, in Swami Vimalananda (trans.), *Mahanarayanopanishad*, p.152.
9. *Taittiriya Aranyaka* 10.1.24, in Yatiswarananda, *Universal Prayers*, p. 63.
10. *Taittiriya Aranyaka* 10.1.30, ibid., p. 63.
11. *Bhagavad Gita* 10.20, pp. 244–45.
12. *Bhagavad Gita* 13.22, p. 296.
13. *Bhagavad Gita* 13.32, p. 302.
14. *Vishvasara Tantra*, in Yatiswarananda, *Universal Prayers*, p. 155.
15. *Vishnu Purana* 1.12.71, ibid., p. 105.

Chapter 13: Meditation on Virata Purusha, the Cosmic Person

1. *Katha Upanishad* 2.1.9, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 164.
2. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.14.2, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, pp. 206–7.
3. *Rig Veda* 10.90.1. See *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 102.
4. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 3.16, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 103.
5. *Mundaka Upanishad* 2.1.4, ibid., vol. 1, p. 282.
6. See *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 6.7, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 133.
7. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 3.9, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 100.
8. *Bhagavad Gita* 11.3, p. 254.
9. Ibid., 11.5 and 8, pp. 254–55.
10. Ibid., 11.15, 16, 19, and 20, pp. 256–57.

Chapter 14: Meditation on the Sacred Word Om

1. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 636.
2. *Mandukya Upanishad* 1–6. From "Om: The Universal Symbol," an unpublished lecture by Swami Nikhilananda.
3. *Mandukya Upanishad* 7, ibid.
4. *Mandukya Upanishad* 8, ibid.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

5. *Mandukya Upanishad* 9, ibid.
6. *Mandukya Upanishad* 10, ibid.
7. *Mandukya Upanishad* 11, ibid.
8. *Mandukya Upanishad* 12, ibid.
9. *Gaudapada Karika* 1.12.24, in Swami Nikhilananda (trans.), *The Mandukyopanishad with Gaudapada's Karika and Shankara's Commentary*, p. 81.
10. *Gaudapada Karika* 1.12.25, p. 81.
11. *Gaudapada Karika* 1.12.26, p. 82.
12. *Gaudapada Karika* 1.12.27, p. 83.
13. *Gaudapada Karika* 1.12.28, p. 84.
14. *Gaudapada Karika* 1.12.29, p. 84.
15. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 547.
16. *Rig Veda* 1.3.21 and 10.114.8 and *Satapatha Brahmana* 8.1.2.9.
17. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 422–23.
18. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 416 and 404.
19. *Satapatha Brahmana* 7.5.2.6; *Panchavimsa Brahmana* 20.14.2; *Rig Veda* 1.3.21.
20. John 1:1.
21. See *The Shiva Purana*, part 1, translated by a Board of Scholars (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), pp. 106–7.
22. *Panchadasi of Vidyaranya*, 4.61 and 9.151, pp. 124 and 455.
23. In Swami Madhavananda (trans.), *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1997), p. 502.
24. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 465.
25. *Katha Upanishad* 1.2.15–17, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 138–40.
26. *Mundaka Upanishad* 2.2.4 and 6, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 290–91.
27. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 1.13–14, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 85.
28. *Prasna Upanishad* 5.1–7, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, pp. 187–91.
29. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 5.1.1, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 3, p. 317.
30. *Taittiriya Upanishad* 1.4.1. and 1.8.1, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, pp. 18 and 26.
31. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 2.23.2–3, in *The Upanishads*, p. 180.
32. *Bhagavad Gita* 5.8, p. 183.
33. *Bhagavad Gita* 9.17, p. 225.
34. *Bhagavad Gita* 10.25, p. 246.
35. *Bhagavad Gita* 8.12–13, p. 202.
36. *Bhagavad Gita* 17.23–24, pp. 340–41.
37. *The Cloud of Unknowing* (London: John M. Watkins, 1922), chapters 37–38.
38. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* 33.1, in Swami Vimalananda (trans.), *Mahanarayanopanishad*, p. 206.
39. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* 35.2, ibid., p. 215.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

40. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 4.17.1–3, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, pp. 246–47.
41. *Bhagavad Gita* 17.24–28, pp. 341–42.
42. *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.27, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 635.
43. *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.28, ibid., p. 636.
44. *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.29, ibid., p. 637.
45. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 1.1.10, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, pp. 116–17.
46. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 636–37.
47. See Swami Satprakashananda, *Methods of Knowledge*, p. 289.
48. See ibid., p. 291.
49. Quoted ibid., pp. 297–98.
50. *Mahanirvana Tantra* 14.122, quoted in Swami Yatiswarananda, *Meditation and Spiritual Life*, p. 301.
51. *Tantrasara*, ibid.
52. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 5.2.1–3, in Swami Satprakashananda, *Methods of Knowledge*, pp. 298–99.
53. Swami Satprakashananda, *Methods of Knowledge*, p. 299.
54. From the *Atma Gita*, quoted in T. M. P. Mahadevan, *On the Philosophy of Advaita* (New Delhi: Gulab Vazirani for Arnold Heinemann Publishers, 1976), p. 263.

Chapter 15: Meditation on the Gayatri Mantra

1. Swami Sambuddhananda, *Vedic Prayers* (Bombay: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1945), pp. 22-23.
2. *Bhagavad Gita* 10.35, p. 250.
3. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.12.1, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, p. 200.
4. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.12.2–4, pp. 200–1.
5. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.12.5–6, pp. 201–2.
6. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.12.7, p. 91.
7. Sir John Woodroffe, *The Garland of Letters*, pp. 373–75.
8. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 5.14.1–4, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 3, pp. 339–41.
9. Woodroffe, *The Garland of Letters*, pp. 214–17.
10. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 108.
11. Ibid., 107.
12. *Devi Mahatmyam* 1.72–4. See Swami Jagadisvarananda (trans.), *The Devi-Mahatmyam* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1955), pp. 15–16.
13. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 256.
14. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* 35.2, in Swami Vimalananda (trans.), *Mahanarayanopanishad*, p. 215.
15. *Mahanarayana Upanishad*, commentary on 35.2, p. 215.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

16. *Mahanarayana Upanishad*, commentary on 35.2, p. 215.
17. *Mahanarayana Upanishad*, commentary 34.1–2 and 35.1, pp. 207, 209, and 210–11.
18. Quoted in I. K. Taimni, *Gayatri*, (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1983), pp. 195–96.

Chapter 16: Meditation on the Great Vedic Sayings

1. *Aitareya Upanishad* 3.1.3, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 3, pp. 38–39.
2. Ibid., p. 29
3. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.3.2–6, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 3, pp. 262–63.
4. Ibid., p. 263.
5. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10, ibid., pp. 122–23.
6. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 2.4.4, ibid., pp. 176–77.
7. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.8, ibid., p. 121.
8. *Panchadasi of Vidyaranya*, 12.7–11, pp. 525–26 and 527.
9. *Mandukya Upanishad* 1.7.10. and 2.19–28, in Swami Nikhilananda (trans.), *The Mandukyopanishad with Gaudapada's Karika and Shankara's Commentary*, pp. 57 and 109–15.
10. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 316.
11. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, v. 6, p. 3.
12. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 6.11–13 and 15, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, pp. 136–38 and 139.
13. *Mandukya Upanishad* 2, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 224.
14. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 5.3.1, ibid., vol. 3, p. 323.
15. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 8.1.1, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, p. 359.
16. Ibid., pp. 360–61.
17. Ibid., p. 361.
18. *Mundaka Upanishad* 2.2.1–2, ibid., vol. I, pp. 288–89.
19. *Katha Upanishad* 2.1.12 and 2.2.1, ibid., pp. 166 and 169.
20. Ibid., 1.3.3–4, p. 148, and 1.2.20, p. 141.
21. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 6.8.7, ibid., vol. 4, p. 309.
22. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, v.160, p. 61.
23. Ibid., vv. 248–49, p. 97.
24. Ibid., vv. 418–20, pp. 158–59.
25. Verses 254–58 and 260–63 of the *Vivekachudamani*, quoted in Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 92–94.
26. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 367–69 and 372–75, pp. 139–40 and 141–42.
27. *Mundaka Upanishad* 3.1.7–8, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 301.
28. Quoted in Swami Satprakashananda, *Methods of Knowledge*, p. 205.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. *Panchadasi of Vidyaranya*, 9.121–22, p. 445.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

32. *Panchadasi of Vidyaranya*, 9.129–30, 132, 134, 140, and 143–44, ibid., pp. 447–48, 449, 451, 452, and 452–53.

Chapter 17: Meditation on a Sacred Text, Word, or Syllable

1. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms*, 1.36–39.

Chapter 18: The Centers for Meditation

1. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 3.1–2, quoted in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 667.
2. Swami Vivekananda, ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 619.
4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 320.
5. See Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, pp. 347–48.
6. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 620.
7. *Mundaka Upanishad* 2.2.6–7, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 292.
8. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 4.17 and 20, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, pp. 116–17 and 119.
9. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.12.7–9, 3.14.2–4, and 8.3.3, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, pp. 201–2, 206–7, and 366.
10. *Taittiriya Upanishad* 1.6.1, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, p. 23.
11. *Katha Upanishad* 2.3.16–17, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 189–90.
12. *Mundaka Upanishad* 2.1.10, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 286.
13. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 3.13 and 20, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, pp. 101 and 104.
14. *Prasna Upanishad* 3.6, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 172.
15. *Mandukya Upanishad* (*Gaudapada Karika* 1.28), in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 251
16. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 2.5.10, 4.3.7, and 4.4.22, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 3, pp. 188, 264, and 302.
17. *Brahma Upanishad*, vv. 2 and 4, in Swami Madhavananda (trans.), *Minor Upanishads*, pp. 60 and 70.
18. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* 12.1 and 16 and 13.6–12, in Swami Vimalananda (trans.), *Mahanarayanopanishad*, pp. 121–22, 152, and 161–69.
19. *Bhagavad Gita* 5.27–28, pp. 158–59.
20. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.13, p. 165.
21. Swami Vivekananda, "Raja-Yoga," in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 602–3.
22. Ibid., p. 620.
23. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 499–500.
24. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 8, pp. 51–52.
25. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 403–4.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Chapter 19: Dualism, Nondualism, and the Centers

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 915.
2. Ibid., p. 344.
3. Ibid., p. 604.
4. Stanzas 1 and 2, quoted in Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, appendix, p. 217.

Chapter 20: Withdrawal and Concentration of Mind

1. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, v. 14, p. 6.
2. Matthew 26:42.
3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 5, p. 294.
4. Ibid., vol. 8, pp. 38–39.

Chapter 21: Posture

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 517.
2. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 324.
3. Ibid., vol. 6, p. 130.
4. Commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms* 11.46, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 664.
5. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 862.
6. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.47, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 664.
7. Ibid.
8. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.48, ibid.
9. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 3.8, quoted in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 689.
10. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.13, ibid., p. 165.
11. *Vyasa Sutras* 4.1.7, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 693.
12. Ibid., p. 693.
13. "Samkhya Philosophy," 3.34 and 6.24, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 691 and 693.
14. Shankaracharya, *Aparokshanubhuti*, vv. 112–15, pp. 60–62.

Chapter 22: Time and Place, Spiritual Vibrations, and Geographical Directions

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 6, p. 130.
2. Swami Mokshadananda (trans.), *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* of Swami Vidyaranya, pp. 235–37.
3. *A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*, p. 160.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

4. *Vyasa Sutras* 4.1.11, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 694.
5. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 619–20.
6. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.11–12 and 14, pp. 165 and 166.
7. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 81.
8. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.6 and 10, quoted in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 689.
9. "Samkhya Philosophy," 4.9 and 10, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 692.
10. Ibid.
11. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, p. 223.
12. See *Uddhava Gita* 4.10, p. 61.
13. *Uddhava Gita* 21.23, 26, and 31, pp. 317, 318, and 319.
14. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.10, p. 165.
15. See *Katha Upanishad* 2.2.3 and note, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 170–71.
16. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 592.
17. Ibid., pp. 655–56 and 596.
18. Ibid., pp. 590–91.

Chapter 23: Physical Condition, Eating Habits, and Exercise

1. See *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.7 and 2.1.1, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 150 and 159.
2. *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.30, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 637.
3. *Bhagavad Gita* 17.8–10, p. 336.
4. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 7.26.2, quoted in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 3, p. 65.
5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 267.
6. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 3, pp. 65–66.
7. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 7.
8. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 66.
9. Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 483, 481, 483, 484, and 484–85.
10. Ibid., pp. 485–86.
11. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 430.
12. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 564.
13. Swami Saradananda, in *Spiritual Talks*, p. 357.
14. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, p. 223.
15. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.16–17, pp. 166–67.
16. Swami Mokshadananda (trans.), *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* of Swami Vidyaranya, p. 255.
17. *Manu Smriti* 2.57, in *The Laws of Manu*, translated by Wendy Doniger with Brian K. Smith, p. 23.
18. Swami Brahmananda, *A Guide to Spiritual Life*, pp. 93 and 92.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Chapter 19: Dualism, Nondualism, and the Centers

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 915.
2. Ibid., p. 344.
3. Ibid., p. 604.
4. Stanzas 1 and 2, quoted in Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, appendix, p. 217.

Chapter 20: Withdrawal and Concentration of Mind

1. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, v. 14, p. 6.
2. Matthew 26:42.
3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 5, p. 294.
4. Ibid., vol. 8, pp. 38–39.

Chapter 21: Posture

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 517.
2. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 324.
3. Ibid., vol. 6, p. 130.
4. Commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms* 11.46, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 664.
5. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 862.
6. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.47, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 664.
7. Ibid.
8. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.48, ibid.
9. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 3.8, quoted in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 689.
10. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.13, ibid., p. 165.
11. *Vyasa Sutras* 4.1.7, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 693.
12. Ibid., p. 693.
13. "Samkhya Philosophy," 3.34 and 6.24, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 691 and 693.
14. Shankaracharya, *Aparokshanubhuti*, vv. 112–15, pp. 60–62.

Chapter 22: Time and Place, Spiritual Vibrations, and Geographical Directions

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 6, p. 130.
2. Swami Mokshadananda (trans.), *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* of Swami Vidyaranya, pp. 235–37.
3. *A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*, p. 160.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

4. *Vyasa Sutras* 4.1.11, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 694.
5. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 619–20.
6. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.11–12 and 14, pp. 165 and 166.
7. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 81.
8. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.6 and 10, quoted in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 689.
9. "Samkhya Philosophy," 4.9 and 10, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 692.
10. Ibid.
11. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, p. 223.
12. See *Uddhava Gita* 4.10, p. 61.
13. *Uddhava Gita* 21.23, 26, and 31, pp. 317, 318, and 319.
14. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.10, p. 165.
15. See *Katha Upanishad* 2.2.3 and note, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 170–71.
16. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 592.
17. Ibid., pp. 655–56 and 596.
18. Ibid., pp. 590–91.

Chapter 23: Physical Condition, Eating Habits, and Exercise

1. See *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.7 and 2.1.1, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 150 and 159.
2. *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.30, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 637.
3. *Bhagavad Gita* 17.8–10, p. 336.
4. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 7.26.2, quoted in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 3, p. 65.
5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 267.
6. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 3, pp. 65–66.
7. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 7.
8. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 66.
9. Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 483, 481, 483, 484, and 484–85.
10. Ibid., pp. 485–86.
11. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 430.
12. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 564.
13. Swami Saradananda, in *Spiritual Talks*, p. 357.
14. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, p. 223.
15. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.16–17, pp. 166–67.
16. Swami Mokshadananda (trans.), *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* of Swami Vidyaranya, p. 255.
17. *Manu Smriti* 2.57, in *The Laws of Manu*, translated by Wendy Doniger with Brian K. Smith, p. 23.
18. Swami Brahmananda, *A Guide to Spiritual Life*, pp. 93 and 92.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

19. Swami Turiyananda, in *Spiritual Talks*, pp. 168–69.
20. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, pp. 518–19.
21. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.17, p. 167.

Chapter 24: Self-Analysis

1. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.59, p. 95.
2. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 12–13, p. 5.
3. Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge: Atmabodha*, v. 2, p. 119.
4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 417–18.
5. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 296–97, p. 113.
6. *Bhagavad Gita* 4.25–27 and 24, pp. 137–38 and 136.
7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 8, pp. 47–48.
8. *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.13, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 155.
9. *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.3–4, ibid., p. 148.
10. *Bhagavad Gita* 5.13, p. 151.
11. Bhartrihari, *Vairagya Satakam* (One Hundred Verses on Dispassion), v. 31, in *The Satakas or Wise Sayings of Bhartrihari*, translated by J. M. Kennedy (London: Wernie Laurie, n.d.), p. 124.
12. From the hymn "A Cudgel for Delusion," vv. 4 and 5, quoted in Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 214–15.
13. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.69, p. 99.

Chapter 25: Mystic Worship

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 8, p. 135.
2. Swami Suddhasatwananda, *Worship of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1954), p. 23.
3. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, pp. 274–75, 276, and 265.
4. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, abridged ed., p. 241.

Chapter 26: Japa, or Repetition of a Sacred Word

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 465.
2. Psalms 5:11.
3. Psalms 29:2.
4. Psalms 34:3–4.
5. Psalms 66:1–3.
6. *Bhagavad Gita* 7.21, p. 192.
7. *Bhagavad Gita* 10.25, p. 247: "Of sacrifices I am the sacrifice of *japa*."
8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 7, pp. 407–08.
9. *Katha Upanishad* 1.2.15–16, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 138–39.
10. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.27–29, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 635–37.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

11. Genesis 1:3.
12. John 1:1.
13. Quoted in Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, p. 56.
14. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 77.
15. Quoted in Swami Tyagishananda (trans.), *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, p. 181.
16. Ibid., p. 183.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 184.
19. Ibid.
20. In Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 558.
21. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 38.
22. Sri Sarada Devi, in *Spiritual Talks*, p. 10.
23. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 378.
24. Swami Aseshananda, *Glimpses of a Great Soul*, p. 165.
25. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, pp. 45–46.
26. Ibid., p. 44.
27. *Haribhaktivilasa* 2.119, quoted in Swami Prameyananda, "Japa Yoga," in *The Vedanta Kesari* (October 2001), p. 375. Published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, India.
28. *Varaha Upanishad* 5.119.
29. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* 13.7, in *Mahanarayanopanishad*, p. 162.
30. *Taittiriya Upanishad* 3.10.4.
31. Georg Feuerstein, Subhash Kak, and David Frawley, *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), p. 205, quoted in Swami Prameyananda, "Japa Yoga," p. 377.
32. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.11–12, p. 165.
33. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, pp. 50–51.
34. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.28, in Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, p. 124.
35. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 1.1.10, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, p. 116.
36. *Mahanirvana Tantra* 3.31, quoted in Aswini Kumar Datta, *Bhaktiyoga* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971), p. 167.
37. Quoted in Swami Tyagisananda (trans.), *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, p. 188.
38. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 46.
39. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, abridged ed., p. 345.
40. Ibid., pp. 231–32.
41. *Bhakti Ratnavali*, translated by Swami Tapasyananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1979), p. 180.
42. In Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, pp. 208 and 227.
43. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 38.
44. *Haribhaktivilasa* 2.11.521–24.
45. Quoted in Swami Tyagishananda (trans.), *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, p. 179.
46. Quoted in M. A. Kamath, *Hinduism and Modern Science* (Mangalore, India: M. A. Kamath, 1947), p. 167.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

19. Swami Turiyananda, in *Spiritual Talks*, pp. 168–69.
20. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, pp. 518–19.
21. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.17, p. 167.

Chapter 24: Self-Analysis

1. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.59, p. 95.
2. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 12–13, p. 5.
3. Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge: Atmabodha*, v. 2, p. 119.
4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 417–18.
5. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 296–97, p. 113.
6. *Bhagavad Gita* 4.25–27 and 24, pp. 137–38 and 136.
7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 8, pp. 47–48.
8. *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.13, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 155.
9. *Katha Upanishad* 1.3.3–4, ibid., p. 148.
10. *Bhagavad Gita* 5.13, p. 151.
11. Bhartrihari, *Vairagya Satakam* (One Hundred Verses on Dispassion), v. 31, in *The Satakas or Wise Sayings of Bhartrihari*, translated by J. M. Kennedy (London: Wernie Laurie, n.d.), p. 124.
12. From the hymn "A Cudgel for Delusion," vv. 4 and 5, quoted in Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 214–15.
13. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.69, p. 99.

Chapter 25: Mystic Worship

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 8, p. 135.
2. Swami Suddhasatwananda, *Worship of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1954), p. 23.
3. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, pp. 274–75, 276, and 265.
4. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, abridged ed., p. 241.

Chapter 26: Japa, or Repetition of a Sacred Word

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 465.
2. Psalms 5:11.
3. Psalms 29:2.
4. Psalms 34:3–4.
5. Psalms 66:1–3.
6. *Bhagavad Gita* 7.21, p. 192.
7. *Bhagavad Gita* 10.25, p. 247: "Of sacrifices I am the sacrifice of *japa*."
8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 7, pp. 407–08.
9. *Katha Upanishad* 1.2.15–16, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 138–39.
10. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.27–29, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 635–37.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

11. Genesis 1:3.
12. John 1:1.
13. Quoted in Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, p. 56.
14. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 77.
15. Quoted in Swami Tyagishananda (trans.), *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, p. 181.
16. Ibid., p. 183.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 184.
19. Ibid.
20. In Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 558.
21. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 38.
22. Sri Sarada Devi, in *Spiritual Talks*, p. 10.
23. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 378.
24. Swami Aseshananda, *Glimpses of a Great Soul*, p. 165.
25. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, pp. 45–46.
26. Ibid., p. 44.
27. *Haribhaktivilasa* 2.119, quoted in Swami Prameyananda, "Japa Yoga," in *The Vedanta Kesari* (October 2001), p. 375. Published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, India.
28. *Varaha Upanishad* 5.119.
29. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* 13.7, in *Mahanarayanopanishad*, p. 162.
30. *Taittiriya Upanishad* 3.10.4.
31. Georg Feuerstein, Subhash Kak, and David Frawley, *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), p. 205, quoted in Swami Prameyananda, "Japa Yoga," p. 377.
32. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.11–12, p. 165.
33. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, pp. 50–51.
34. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.28, in Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, p. 124.
35. *Chhandogya Upanishad* 1.1.10, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 4, p. 116.
36. *Mahanirvana Tantra* 3.31, quoted in Aswini Kumar Datta, *Bhaktiyoga* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971), p. 167.
37. Quoted in Swami Tyagisananda (trans.), *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, p. 188.
38. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 46.
39. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, abridged ed., p. 345.
40. Ibid., pp. 231–32.
41. *Bhakti Ratnavali*, translated by Swami Tapasyananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1979), p. 180.
42. In Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, pp. 208 and 227.
43. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 38.
44. *Haribhaktivilasa* 2.11.521–24.
45. Quoted in Swami Tyagishananda (trans.), *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, p. 179.
46. Quoted in M. A. Kamath, *Hinduism and Modern Science* (Mangalore, India: M. A. Kamath, 1947), p. 167.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

47. *Bhagavad Gita* 10.25, p. 246.
48. Quoted in Swami Tyagishananda (trans.), *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, p. 179.
49. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.44, in Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, p. 178.
50. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, p. 178.
51. Quoted in Datta, *Bhaktiyoga*, p. 165.
52. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 95.
53. Ibid., p. 203.
54. Ibid., p. 204.
55. Ibid., p. 210.
56. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 48.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., p. 39.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., p. 40.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., p. 68.
63. Ibid., p 148.
64. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 7, p. 37.
65. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 290.
66. Ibid., vol. 7, p. 63.
67. In Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, p. 239.

Chapter 27: Pranayama, or Control of Breath

1. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 593 and 595.
2. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.8, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 91.
3. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.13, p. 165.
4. *Bhagavad Gita* 4.29, p. 139.
5. *Bhagavad Gita* 8.9–10, pp. 200–201.
6. *Atma Upanishad*, v. 3, in Swami Madhavananda (trans.), *Minor Upanishads*, p. 15.
7. Shankaracharya, *Aparokshanubhuti*, vv. 118–20, pp. 64–65.
8. *Mukti Upanishad*, quoted in Swami Sivananda, *The Science of Pranayama* (Sivanandanagar, Tehri-Garhwal: Divine Life Society, 1971), p. 86.
9. *Yogatattva Upanishad*, quoted ibid.
10. *Manu Smriti*, quoted ibid., p. 87.
11. *Vishnu Purana*, quoted ibid.
12. See Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.52–53, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 665.
13. Ibid., p. 593.
14. *Rig Veda* 10.129, quoted in Swami Vivekananda, *In Search of God and Other Poems* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968), p. 76.
15. *Katha Upanishad* 2.3.2, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 181.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

16. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 592.
17. Ibid., p. 603.
18. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.9, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 92.
19. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 587.
20. Quoted in "Raja-Yoga," in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 690.
21. *Uddhava Gita* 23.38–40, pp. 353–54.
22. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 606.
23. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.50 and 51, ibid., p. 664.
24. *Manu Smriti* 4.218–22, in *The Laws of Manu*, translated by Wendy Doniger with Brian K. Smith, p. 94.
25. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 13 and 84.

Chapter 28: Milestones of Progress

1. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.11, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 93.
2 *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.12, p. 93.
3. See Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.35, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 640.
4. Quoted in Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 739.
5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 604 and 744–45.
6. Ibid., pp. 161 and 544.
7. The colors of the centers are taken from the following sources. The colors of the first, second, third, fifth, and sixth centers are taken from M. P. Pandit, *Kundalini Yoga: A Brief Study of Sir John Woodroffe's "The Serpent Power"* (Madras: Ganesh & Co. Private Ltd., 1971), pp. 34–38. The color of the fourth center is taken from a song in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (p. 262), which describes the color of three of the centers; the third it describes as "blue," the fourth as of "scarlet flame," and the fifth as of "smoky hue." The color of the seventh center is taken from the glossary of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 1039.
8. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 500.
9. Ibid., pp. 829–30.
10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 7, p. 253.
11. Ibid., pp. 254–55.
12. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.19, quoted in Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God*, pp. 195–96.
13. Ibid., p. 196.
14. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 619.
15. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 3.9 and 11–12, ibid., pp. 668–69.
16. Swami Mokshadananda (trans.), *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* of Swami Vidyaranya, pp. 253 and 230–31.
17. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 1.17–18, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 631–32.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

18. Shankaracharya, *Aparokshanubhuti*, pp. 54–67.
19. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 248 and 344.
20. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 79, 80, 84, 367–70, 372–76, 419–22, and 424, pp. 29, 31, 139–40, 141–43, and 159–60.
21. Bhartrihari, *Vairagya-Satakam* v. 31, translated by Swami Madhavananda, p. 19.
22. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 214.
23. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 680.
24. Ibid., p. 77.
25. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 48.

Chapter 29: Mystical Experiences and Realizations

1. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 4.1, in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 679.
2. Ibid., p. 680.
3. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 470.
4. Ibid., pp. 470–71.
5. Ibid., p. 467.
6. Ibid., pp. 467–68.
7. Ibid., p. 469.
8. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 459 and 547.
9. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 514.
10. "Inspired Talks," in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 549.
11. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, abridged ed., pp. 180–81.
12. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 346–47.
13. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, pp. 453 and 454–55.
14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 5, pp. 346–47.
15. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 614–15.

Chapter 30: The Transformation of Character

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 481–82.
2. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.54, p. 92.
3. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 2.13, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 94.
4. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 610.
5. Ibid., p. 604.
6. *Talks with Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 152–53.
7. *Uddhava Gita* 4.27, p. 68.
8. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.16–17, pp. 166–67.
9. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 630.
10. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.50, p. 90.
11. Swami Turiyananda, in *Spiritual Talks*, p. 171.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

12. *Uddhava Gita* 18.46–47, p. 282.
13. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.66–67, p. 98.
14. *Bhagavad Gita* 5.23, p. 157.
15. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.36, p. 173.
16. *Shrimad Bhagavatam* 11.8.21, quoted by Swami Turiyananda in *Spiritual Talks*, p. 169.
17. Swami Turiyananda, in *Spiritual Talks*, pp. 168–69.
18. Ibid., pp. 170–71, 242, and 320.
19. *Katha Upanishad* 1.3–4, 1.9, and 2.10–11, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 148, 150, and 184–85.
20. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 84 and 367, pp. 31 and 139.
21. Swami Trigunatitananda, in *Religion and Its Practice*, p. 42.
22. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.32.
23. Patanjali, *Yoga Aphorisms* 2.40.
24. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.14, p. 166.
25. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 606.
26. Matthew 19:11–12.
27. In Swami Trigunatitananda, in *Religion and Its Practice*, p. 42.
28. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.34–35, p. 172.
29. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 995.
30. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.59, p. 95.
31. Shankaracharya's commentary, in Swami Nikhilananda (trans.), *Bhagavad Gita* 10.11, p. 241.
32. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, v. 14, p. 6.
33. *Bhagavad Gita* 18.67, pp. 369–70.
34. *Mundaka Upanishad* 3.1.5, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 300.
35. *Kena Upanishad* 4.8, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, p. 247.
36. *Mundaka Upanishad* 3.2.10–11, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, pp. 310–11.
37. *Prasna Upanishad* 1.1.6, in *The Upanishads*, vol. 2, p. 162.
38. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 356.
39. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 564.
40. Swami Trigunatitananda, in *Religion and Its Practice*, pp. 34–35.
41. Ibid., pp. 32–33.
42. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 356.
43. Quoted in Swami Yatiswarananda, *Meditation and Spiritual Life*, p. 168.
44. Quoted by Swami Brahmananda in Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, p. 244.
45. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 551.
46. *Bhagavad Gita* 2.62–63, p. 96.
47. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 168.
48. Swami Turiyananda, in *Spiritual Talks*, pp. 323–25.
49. In Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, pp. 279–81.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

50. Shankaracharya, *Aparokshanubhuti*, v. 144, p. 78.
51. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 374–75, p. 142.
52. Bhartrihari, *Vairagya-Satakam*, v. 49, translated by Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1976), p. 30.
53. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 29–30 and 79, pp. 10 and 29.
54. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, pp. 210 and 232.
55. Ibid., pp. 214 and 210.
56. *Talks with Swami Vivekananda*, p. 253.
57. Ibid., p. 191.
58. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 410–11.
59. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 864.
60. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 5, pp. 395-97; *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 244–45 and 249–50.
61. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.10, p. 165.
62. Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, v. 68, p. 171.
63. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 7, p. 120.
64. *Uttara Gita*, quoted in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 388.
65. *Narada Pancharatra*, quoted in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 410.
66. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 147.
67. Quoted in Shankaracharya, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 172.
68. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.31–32, p. 171.
69. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 427.
70. Ibid., pp. 426–27.
71. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 503 and 680.
72. Ibid., pp. 202–3, 674, and 680.
73. *Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.5.2, quoted in *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, introduction, p. 46.
74. *Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.8.1–4, quoted ibid., p. 47.
75. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 178, 103, 204, 265, 756–57; abridged ed., p. 311.
76. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 419–20, p. 139.
77. Ibid., v. 482, p. 180.
78. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.20–23, pp. 167–68.
79. *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, vv. 4–6.
80. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 95.
81. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 540, 543, 544, 440, 442, 542, and 536, pp. 201, 202–3, 166, 202, and 199.

Chapter 31: The Sacred Texts on Progress in Meditation

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 745.
2. Ibid., p. 832.
3. Ibid., p. 611.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 735.
6. Ibid., p. 485.
7. Ibid., p. 83.
8. Ibid., p. 134.
9. Ibid., p. 734.
10. Ibid., p. 481.
11. Ibid., p. 115.
12. Ibid., pp. 533–34.
13. Ibid., p. 125.
14. Ibid., p. 161.
15. Ibid., p. 125.
16. Ibid., p. 396.
17. Ibid., p. 674.
18. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* abridged ed., p. 245.
19. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* p. 612.
20. Ibid., p. 148.
21. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* abridged ed., p. 167.
22. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* p. 534.
23. Ibid., pp. 138 and 328–29.
24. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* abridged ed., p. 130.
25. Ibid., p. 865.
26. Ibid., p. 476.
27. Ibid., p. 203.
28. Ibid., pp. 607 and 608.
29. Ibid., p. 140.
30. Ibid., p. 503.
31. Ibid., p. 957.
32. Ibid., p. 172.
33. Ibid., p. 408.
34. Ibid., p. 218.
35. "Inspired Talks," in *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works,* p. 546.
36. Ibid., pp. 545–46.
37. Swami Prabhavananda (trans.), *The Wisdom of God (Srimad Bhagavatam)*, pp. 55–56.
38. *Uddhava Gita* 9.32–37 and 18.46–47, pp. 135–37 and 282.

Chapter 32: Obstacles in Meditation and Ways of Overcoming Them

1. *Bhagavad Gita* 17.8, p. 336.
2. Swami Turiyananda, in *Spiritual Talks,* p. 151.
3. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.17, p. 167.
4. Ibid., note to 6.16, p. 166.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

5. Swami Brahmananda, *A Guide to Spiritual Life*, pp. 160–61.
6. Ibid., pp. 161–62.
7. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.16, p. 166.
8. *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, book 2: *Her Conversations*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1980), p. 334.
9. *Talks with Swami Vivekananda*, p. 249.
10. Swami Aseshananda, *Glimpses of a Great Soul: A Portrait of Swami Saradananda* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1982), pp. 142–43.
11. Ibid., pp. 197–98.
12. *Manu Smriti* 2.52, 53, 56, and 57, in *The Laws of Manu*, translated by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, p. 23.
13. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, pp. 132–33.
14. Ibid., p. 133.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 134.
17. Swami Mokshadananda (trans.), *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* of Swami Vidyaranya, p. 255.
18. Shankaracharya, *Aparokshanubhuti*, vv. 127–28 and 144, translated by Swami Vimuktananda, pp. 69 and 78.
19. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 79 and 84, pp. 29 and 31.
20. *Uddhava Gita* 15.19–21, and 23.38–42 and 44, pp. 222–23 and 353–55.
21. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, vv. 419 and 420, p. 159.
22. Swami Mokshadananda (trans.), *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* of Swami Vidyaranya, p. 186.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Glossary

adharma Unrighteousness; the opposite of *dharma.*

Advaita Nonduality; a school of Vedanta philosophy, declaring the oneness of God, soul, and universe.

Aham Brahmasmi "I am Brahman," one of the four great Vedic sayings, or *mahavakyas.*

ahamkara Ego or I-consciousness.

ajna The sixth center of consciousness in the *sushumna,* at the space between the eyebrows.

akasha Ether or space; the first and subtlest of the five elements that constitute the universe. The other four are fire, air, water, and earth.

anahata The fourth center of consciousness in the *sushumna,* at the level of the heart.

asamprajnata samadhi In Yoga, the perfect superconscious state that gives us freedom. It is seedless; that is, in this *samadhi* all the tendencies of the mind have been destroyed.

asana Yogic posture for meditation.

Atman Self. It denotes also the Supreme Soul, which, according to Advaita Vedanta, is one with the individual soul.

Aum *See* Om.

avatara Incarnation of God.

Bhagavad Gita An important Hindu scripture, part of the *Mahabharata* epic, containing the teachings of Sri Krishna.

Bhagavan Literally, one endowed with the six attributes, namely

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

infinite prosperity, strength, glory, splendor, knowledge, and renunciation. An epithet of the Godhead; also the Personal God of the devotee.

bhakti yoga The path of devotion followed by dualistic worshippers.

brahmacharya The life of an unmarried student *(brahmachari* or *brahmacharin)*, one of four traditional stages of life. Hence, celibacy or continence.

Brahman The Absolute; the Supreme Reality.

buddhi The intelligence or discrimination faculty; the seat of wisdom.

Chaitanya (also Chaitanyadeva, 1485–1533) A great prophet who emphasized the path of divine love for the realization of God, revered by many as an Incarnation.

chakra Any one of the six energy centers, or lotuses, in the *sushumna,* through which the *kundalini* rises.

chitta The "mind-stuff"; one of four functions of the mind (along with *buddhi*, *ahamkara,* and *manas*); that part of the inner organ which is the storehouse of memory.

deva Literally, "shining being"; a god.

dharana Concentration; fixing the mind on a point.

dharma Righteousness; religion; duty.

dhyana Meditation, in which the mind flows continuously toward its object.

Durga A name of the Divine Mother.

Gayatri (1) The Gayatri mantra, a sacred verse of the Vedas, repeated by brahmins as part of their devotions. (2) The *gayatri* meter, an important meter in Vedic verses, containing twenty-four syllables.

guna One of the basic modifications of nature. According to the Samkhya philosophy, Prakriti (Nature), in contrast with Purusha (Spirit), consists of three *gunas* (qualities or strands), known as *sattva*, *rajas,* and *tamas.*

Hiranyagarbha Literally, the golden egg or womb. The first manifestation of Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with attributes, in the relative universe. The Cosmic Mind.

homa Vedic fire worship, in which offerings are made in a fire as the symbol of Brahman.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

ida One of three important *nadis*, or nerves, in the nervous system. *See* sushumna.

Ishtadevata The Chosen Ideal, Spiritual Ideal, or Ideal Deity of the devotee.

Ishtam Chosen Ideal.

Ishvara The Personal God.

Ishvarakoti A perfected soul born with a special spiritual message for humanity.

Isvara *See* Ishvara.

japa Repetition of the Lord's name or of a sacred formula taught to the disciple by a spiritual teacher.

jiva The individual soul; a living being; an ordinary person.

jivanmukta One who has attained liberation from *maya* while living in the body.

jivatman The embodied soul; individual consciousness.

jnana The knowledge by which one is aware of one's identity with Brahman.

jnana yoga Spiritual discipline mainly based upon philosophical discrimination between the real and the unreal, and renunciation of the unreal.

Kali An epithet of the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy.

karma (1) Action in general; duty. (2) the law of cause and effect.

karma yoga Spiritual discipline based upon the unselfish performance of duty without attachment to the fruits of action.

kosha Literally, sheath or covering. One of five layerings or bodies that cover the Soul, which is unaffected by any of them. They are: the gross sheath or physical body *(annamayakosha)*, the vital sheath *(pranamayakosha)*, the mental sheath *(manomayakosha)*, the sheath of intelligence or intellect *(vijnanamayakosha)*, and the sheath of bliss *(anandamayakosha)*.

kundalini Literally, the serpent power. The spiritual energy lying coiled up, or dormant, at the base of the spine in all individuals. When awakened through spiritual practice, it rises through the spinal column, passes through various centers, *chakras*, and at last reaches the brain, whereupon the yogi experiences *samadhi*.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

infinite prosperity, strength, glory, splendor, knowledge, and renunciation. An epithet of the Godhead; also the Personal God of the devotee.

bhakti yoga The path of devotion followed by dualistic worshippers.

brahmacharya The life of an unmarried student *(brahmachari* or *brahmacharin)*, one of four traditional stages of life. Hence, celibacy or continence.

Brahman The Absolute; the Supreme Reality.

buddhi The intelligence or discrimination faculty; the seat of wisdom.

Chaitanya (also Chaitanyadeva, 1485–1533) A great prophet who emphasized the path of divine love for the realization of God, revered by many as an Incarnation.

chakra Any one of the six energy centers, or lotuses, in the *sushumna,* through which the *kundalini* rises.

chitta The "mind-stuff"; one of four functions of the mind (along with *buddhi*, *ahamkara,* and *manas*); that part of the inner organ which is the storehouse of memory.

deva Literally, "shining being"; a god.

dharana Concentration; fixing the mind on a point.

dharma Righteousness; religion; duty.

dhyana Meditation, in which the mind flows continuously toward its object.

Durga A name of the Divine Mother.

Gayatri (1) The Gayatri mantra, a sacred verse of the Vedas, repeated by brahmins as part of their devotions. (2) The *gayatri* meter, an important meter in Vedic verses, containing twenty-four syllables.

guna One of the basic modifications of nature. According to the Samkhya philosophy, Prakriti (Nature), in contrast with Purusha (Spirit), consists of three *gunas* (qualities or strands), known as *sattva*, *rajas,* and *tamas.*

Hiranyagarbha Literally, the golden egg or womb. The first manifestation of Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with attributes, in the relative universe. The Cosmic Mind.

homa Vedic fire worship, in which offerings are made in a fire as the symbol of Brahman.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

ida One of three important *nadis*, or nerves, in the nervous system. *See* sushumna.

Ishtadevata The Chosen Ideal, Spiritual Ideal, or Ideal Deity of the devotee.

Ishtam Chosen Ideal.

Ishvara The Personal God.

Ishvarakoti A perfected soul born with a special spiritual message for humanity.

Isvara *See* Ishvara.

japa Repetition of the Lord's name or of a sacred formula taught to the disciple by a spiritual teacher.

jiva The individual soul; a living being; an ordinary person.

jivanmukta One who has attained liberation from *maya* while living in the body.

jivatman The embodied soul; individual consciousness.

jnana The knowledge by which one is aware of one's identity with Brahman.

jnana yoga Spiritual discipline mainly based upon philosophical discrimination between the real and the unreal, and renunciation of the unreal.

Kali An epithet of the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy.

karma (1) Action in general; duty. (2) the law of cause and effect.

karma yoga Spiritual discipline based upon the unselfish performance of duty without attachment to the fruits of action.

kosha Literally, sheath or covering. One of five layerings or bodies that cover the Soul, which is unaffected by any of them. They are: the gross sheath or physical body *(annamayakosha)*, the vital sheath *(pranamayakosha)*, the mental sheath *(manomayakosha)*, the sheath of intelligence or intellect *(vijnanamayakosha)*, and the sheath of bliss *(anandamayakosha)*.

kundalini Literally, the serpent power. The spiritual energy lying coiled up, or dormant, at the base of the spine in all individuals. When awakened through spiritual practice, it rises through the spinal column, passes through various centers, *chakras*, and at last reaches the brain, whereupon the yogi experiences *samadhi*.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

lila Divine sport or play. Creation is often explained by the Vaishnavas as the spontaneous *lila* of God.

Mahabharata A celebrated Hindu epic.

mahavakya A great saying or aphorism from the Vedas.

Maheshvara The Supreme Lord of all Lords.

manas Mind; one of the four inner organs of perception, along with *buddhi, chitta,* and *ahamkara.*

manipura The third center of consciousness in the *sushumna;* in the region of the navel.

mantra A sacred word or mystic syllable in Sanskrit, used in *japa.*

Manu The great Hindu lawgiver.

maya Ignorance obscuring the vision of God; the Cosmic Illusion that causes the One to appear as many, the Absolute as the relative.

muladhara The first and lowest center of consciousness in the *sushumna,* at the base of the spine.

Nada The mystic word Om, the symbol of Brahman. Also, Nada-Brahman, the Cosmic Sound.

nadi One of the innumerable nerves in the nervous system. *See* sushumna.

neti, neti Literally, "Not this, not this." The negative process of discrimination. Since Brahman cannot be described, It is referred to by this negative formula.

nididhyasana A state of Self-awareness in which there is neither exertion of will nor conscious effort for concentration.

Nirguna Brahman Brahman without qualities or attributes.

nirvikalpa samadhi The highest state of *samadhi;* the realization of one's total oneness with Brahman.

niyama Discipline, one of the aspects of Yoga. It consists of observances such as cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study of the scriptures, and surrendering the fruits of all action to the Divine.

ojas The highest form of energy in the human body. That part of human energy expressed through sexual action and sexual thought, when checked and controlled, easily becomes changed into *ojas* and is stored in the brain.

Om The most sacred word of the Vedas; a symbol of God and of Brahman. Also written as "Aum."

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

pada Quarter; section; foot. The four "quarters" of Atman are *Vaishvanara* (waking state), *Taijasa* (dream), *Prajna* (deep sleep), and *Turiya* (the state beyond these three).

padmasana The lotus position, a meditation posture with legs crossed so that each foot rests sole up on the opposite thigh. The spinal column is erect, and hands either rest in the lap with palms up, one hand on top of the other, thumbs touching, or are placed on the thighs.

paramahamsa A supremely realized soul.

Paramatman The Supreme Soul.

Patanjali The author of the Yoga system, one of the six systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy, dealing with concentration and its methods, control of the mind, and similar matters.

pingala One of three important *nadis*, or nerves, in the nervous system. *See* sushumna.

Prajna Literally, wisdom. The state of deep, dreamless sleep.

Prakriti Primordial Nature, which, in association with Purusha, creates the universe, according to Yoga philosophy.

prana (1) The vital energy or life force. (2) The breath. (3) One of five functions of the vital force; the names of these five *pranas* are *prana, apana, vyana, udana,* and *samana.* (4) A name of the Cosmic Soul as endowed with activity.

Pranava The sacred syllable Om.

pranayama Control of the breath; one of the disciplines of Yoga.

pratyahara Restraining the sense organs; one of the disciplines of Yoga.

Puranas Books of Hindu mythology.

Purusha Literally, a person. The eternal principle of Pure Consciousness; the Self; the Absolute.

Purushottama God, the Supreme Purusha or Person.

raja yoga A system of Yoga ascribed to Patanjali, dealing with concentration and its methods, control of the mind, *samadhi,* and similar matters.

rajas Activity or restlessness; one of the three *gunas.*

Ramanuja (1017–1137) A great philosopher-saint of South India, the foremost interpreter of the school of Qualified Nondualistic Vedanta.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

rishi A seer of Truth, especially one to whom the words of the Vedas were revealed.

Rudra A manifestation of Shiva.

Saguna Brahman Brahman with attributes and qualities; the Absolute conceived as the Creator, Preserver, or Destroyer of the universe; the Personal God, according to Vedanta.

sahasrara The thousand-petaled lotus, or highest plane of realization, beyond the sixth center of consciousness, at the crown of the head.

Sakti The creative power of Brahman; a name of the Divine Mother.

samadhi Total absorption in the object of meditation or in the Godhead; ecstasy.

Samkhya (also Sankhya) One of the six systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy.

samprajnata samadhi In Yoga, the first of two stages of *samadhi*, in which the body may be transcended but the I-consciousness continues to remain.

samskara A tendency, habit, predisposition, or mental impression created by thoughts and actions.

sannyasin A monk who has renounced the world in order to realize God.

Sarasvati A name for the Gayatri mantra. The goddess of speech and learning.

Satchidananda Literally, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. A name of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.

sattva Balance or wisdom; one of the three *gunas*.

savikalpa samadhi In Vedanta, the first of two stages of *samadhi*, in which the seeker remains conscious of his realization of the unity of his inmost self with the Supreme Self.

Savitri A name for the Gayatri mantra. The Godhead as the inner controller of all beings and things.

Shaiva A worshipper of Shiva. Also known as a Shaivite.

Shakti *See* Sakti.

Shankaracharya (c. 788–820) One of India's greatest philosopher-saints and the chief exponent of Advaita Vedanta. Also known as Sri Shankara.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

shastra Scripture; sacred book.

Shiva The Destroyer God; the third of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Brahma and Vishnu.

Shrimad Bhagavatam One of the Puranas, a well-known scripture dealing with the life of Sri Krishna. Also known as the *Bhagavata Purana.*

Siva *See* Shiva.

smritis The sacred books, subsidiary to the Vedas, guiding the daily life and conduct of Hindus. They include the epics, the Puranas, and the *Manu-Smriti,* or Code of Manu.

Sphota The idea that flashes in the mind when a sound is uttered; the first manifestation of divine wisdom. It is symbolized by Om.

Sri (also *Shri*) Literally, "blessed" or "holy." A prefix used with names or the titles of certain scriptures. It serves as an honorific title before the name of a deity or holy man.

sruti (also *shruti*) The Vedas.

sushumna The central *nadi,* or nerve, situated within the spinal column from the base of the spine to the brain. It is the point of harmony between the *ida* to the left of the spinal column and the *pingala* to the right. The *sushumna,* through which the awakened spiritual energy *(kundalini)* rises, is described as the pathway to Brahman.

svadhisthana The second center of consciousness in the *sushumna,* at the base of the organ of generation.

Taijasa The dream state.

tamas Inertia or dullness; one of the three *gunas.*

tanmatra One of the subtle elements of matter.

Tantras Scriptures dealing with the philosophy of Tantra, in which the Divine Mother, or Power, is the Ultimate Reality.

Turiya Literally the "fourth." The state of the transcendental Self, beyond the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

Uddhava Gita A text that forms part of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam.* It is the parting instructions of Sri Krishna to his beloved devotee and follower Uddhava.

upadhi A Vedantic term for an attribute or limitation imposed upon the Self through ignorance.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

rishi A seer of Truth, especially one to whom the words of the Vedas were revealed.

Rudra A manifestation of Shiva.

Saguna Brahman Brahman with attributes and qualities; the Absolute conceived as the Creator, Preserver, or Destroyer of the universe; the Personal God, according to Vedanta.

sahasrara The thousand-petaled lotus, or highest plane of realization, beyond the sixth center of consciousness, at the crown of the head.

Sakti The creative power of Brahman; a name of the Divine Mother.

samadhi Total absorption in the object of meditation or in the Godhead; ecstasy.

Samkhya (also Sankhya) One of the six systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy.

samprajnata samadhi In Yoga, the first of two stages of *samadhi*, in which the body may be transcended but the I-consciousness continues to remain.

samskara A tendency, habit, predisposition, or mental impression created by thoughts and actions.

sannyasin A monk who has renounced the world in order to realize God.

Sarasvati A name for the Gayatri mantra. The goddess of speech and learning.

Satchidananda Literally, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. A name of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.

sattva Balance or wisdom; one of the three *gunas*.

savikalpa samadhi In Vedanta, the first of two stages of *samadhi*, in which the seeker remains conscious of his realization of the unity of his inmost self with the Supreme Self.

Savitri A name for the Gayatri mantra. The Godhead as the inner controller of all beings and things.

Shaiva A worshipper of Shiva. Also known as a Shaivite.

Shakti *See* Sakti.

Shankaracharya (c. 788–820) One of India's greatest philosopher-saints and the chief exponent of Advaita Vedanta. Also known as Sri Shankara.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

shastra Scripture; sacred book.

Shiva The Destroyer God; the third of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Brahma and Vishnu.

Shrimad Bhagavatam One of the Puranas, a well-known scripture dealing with the life of Sri Krishna. Also known as the *Bhagavata Purana.*

Siva *See* Shiva.

smritis The sacred books, subsidiary to the Vedas, guiding the daily life and conduct of Hindus. They include the epics, the Puranas, and the *Manu-Smriti,* or Code of Manu.

Sphota The idea that flashes in the mind when a sound is uttered; the first manifestation of divine wisdom. It is symbolized by Om.

Sri (also *Shri*) Literally, "blessed" or "holy." A prefix used with names or the titles of certain scriptures. It serves as an honorific title before the name of a deity or holy man.

sruti (also *shruti*) The Vedas.

sushumna The central *nadi,* or nerve, situated within the spinal column from the base of the spine to the brain. It is the point of harmony between the *ida* to the left of the spinal column and the *pingala* to the right. The *sushumna,* through which the awakened spiritual energy *(kundalini)* rises, is described as the pathway to Brahman.

svadhisthana The second center of consciousness in the *sushumna,* at the base of the organ of generation.

Taijasa The dream state.

tamas Inertia or dullness; one of the three *gunas.*

tanmatra One of the subtle elements of matter.

Tantras Scriptures dealing with the philosophy of Tantra, in which the Divine Mother, or Power, is the Ultimate Reality.

Turiya Literally the "fourth." The state of the transcendental Self, beyond the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

Uddhava Gita A text that forms part of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam.* It is the parting instructions of Sri Krishna to his beloved devotee and follower Uddhava.

upadhi A Vedantic term for an attribute or limitation imposed upon the Self through ignorance.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Upanishads Scriptures that contain the inner or mystic teachings of the Vedas.

upasana Intense mental worship.

Vaishnava Literally, a follower of Vishnu. A member of the dualistic sect of that name, generally followers of Chaitanya in Bengal and Ramanuja and Madhva in South India.

Vaishvanara The waking state.

Vedanta One of the six systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy.

Vedas The revealed scriptures of the Hindus, consisting of the *Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda,* and *Atharva Veda.*

videha Detached from the body; without body consciousness.

vidya Knowledge leading to liberation (i.e., to the Ultimate Reality).

Virata Purusha The Cosmic Person or Primordial Man; the Cosmic Body.

Vishnu The Preserver God; the second of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Brahma and Shiva. The Personal God of the Vaishnavas.

Vishva *See* Vaishvanara.

visuddha The fifth center of consciousness in the *sushumna,* at the lower end of the throat.

vritti A "thought-wave" in the mind. Restricting these mental fluctuations is the aim of Yoga, according to Patanjali.

vyahriti One of the seven planes of existence representing seven states of higher consciousness: *bhur, bhuvah, svah, mahah, janah, tapah,* and *satyam.*

yama Self-restraint, one of the disciplines of Yoga. It consists of the moral virtues of nonviolence, truthfulness, noncovetousness, continence, and nonreceiving of gifts.

Yoga (1) One of the six systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy. The Yoga system of Patanjali. (2) Union of the individual soul with the Universal Soul. (3) The method by which to realize union through control of mind and concentration.

yogi (also *yogin;* fem. *yogini*) One who practices yoga.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Bibliography

Aseshananda, Swami. *Glimpses of a Great Soul.* Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1982.

Bhartrihari. *Vairagya-Satakam or The Hundred Verses on Renunciation.* Translated by Swami Madhavananda. Calcutta: Advaita Asharama, 1976.

Brahmananda, Swami. *A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda.* Translated by Swami Chetanananda. St. Louis, Mo.: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1988.

Doniger, Wendy, with Brian K. Smith, trans. *The Laws of Manu.* London: Penguin Books, 1991.

The Life of Swami Vivekananda, by His Eastern and Western Disciples. 8th ed. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974.

Madhavananda, Swami, trans. *Minor Upanishads.* Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968.

———. *Uddhava Gita: The Last Message of Sri Krishna.* Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971.

Mokshadananda, Swami, trans. *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* of Swami Vidyaranya. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1996.

Nikhilananda, Swami. *Holy Mother.* New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1997.

———. *Hinduism: Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit.* New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992.

———. *Man in Search of Immortality: Testimonials from the Hindu Scriptures.* New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

———, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita.* New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992.

———, trans. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.* Recorded by Mahendranath Gupta. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992.

———, trans. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.* Abridged ed. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1988.

———, trans. *The Mandukyopanishad with Gaudapada's Karika and Shankara's Commentary.* Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2000.

———, trans. *The Upanishads.* 4 vols. Vol. 1: *Katha, Isa, Kena,* and *Mundaka Upanishads.* Vol. 2: *Svetasvatara, Prasna,* and *Mandukya Upanishads with Gaudapada's Karika.* Vol. 3: *Aitareya* and *Brihandaranyaka Upanishads.* Vol. 4: *Taittriya* and *Chhandogya Upanishads.* New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1990 (vols. 1–3) and 1994 (vol. 4).

Panchadashi of Vidyaranya. Translated by M. Srinivasa Rau and K. A. Krishnaswamy Aiyar. Sri Rangam, India: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1912.

Prabhavananda, Swami. *The Eternal Companion.* Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1971.

———, trans. *The Wisdom of God (Srimad Bhagavatam).* Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1943.

Prabhavananda, Swami, and Christopher Isherwood, trans. *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali.* New York: New American Library, 1969.

Religion and Its Practice. By the First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992.

Saradananda, Swami. *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master.* 4th ed. Translated by Swami Jagadananda. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970.

Satprakashananda, Swami. *Methods of Knowledge.* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965.

Shankaracharya. *Aparokshanubhuti* (Self-Realization). Translated by Swami Vimuktananda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1938, 1982.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

———. *Self-Knowledge: Atmabodha.* Translated by Swami Nikhilananda. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1989.

———. *Vivekachudamani* (Crest Jewel of Discrimination). Translated by Swami Madhavananda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970.

Spiritual Talks, by the First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968.

Talks with Swami Vivekananda, 2nd ed. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1939.

Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990.

Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1983.

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971.

Tyagishananda, Swami (trans.). *Narada Bhakti Sutras.* Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1972.

Vimalananda, Swami (trans.). *Mahanarayanopanishad.* Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1979.

Vivekananda, Swami. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.* Vols. 1–8. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970–1972.

———. *Raja-Yoga.* New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1956.

———. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works.* Edited by Swami Nikhilananda. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1971.

Woodroffe, Sir John. *The Garland of Letters.* Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922.

Yatiswarananda, Swami. *Meditation and Spiritual Life.* Bangalore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1983.

———, trans. *Universal Prayers.* Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Credits

Grateful acknowledgment is given for permission to use material from the following sources:

From *Gayatri* by I. K. Taimini, © 1983 used by permission of the publisher, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois.

From *The Science of Pranayama* by Swami Sivananda, © used by permission of the publisher, The Divine Life Society, Uttaranchal, India.

From *Vivekachudamani* translated by Swami Madhavananda, ©1970; *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna,* © 1990; *Uddhava Gita: The Last Message of Sri Krishna* translated by Swami Madhavananda, ©1971; *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda,* ©1971; *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* volumes 1–8, © 1970–1972; *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* translated by Swami Madhavananda, © 1997; *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, © 1974; *Minor Upanishads* translated by Swami Madhavananda, © 1968; *Aparokshanubhuti* translated by Swami Vimuktananda, © 1938; *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* translated by Swami Mokshadananda, © 1996; *Spiritual Talks* by The First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, © 1968; *In Search of God and Other Poems* by Swami Vivekananda, © 1968; *Vairagya-Satakam* translated by Swami Madhavananda, © 1976; *Talks with Swami Vivekananda,* © 1939; *Religion and Its Practice* by The First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, © 1992; *The Mandukyopanishad with Gaudapada's Karika and Shankara's Commentary* translated by Swami Nikhilananda, © 2000, used by permission of the publisher, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati and Calcutta, India.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

From *The Eternal Companion* by Swami Prabhavananda, © 1971; *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* translated by Swami Jagadananda, © 1970; *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother,* © 1983; *Narada Bhakti Sutras* translated by Swami Tyagishananda, © 1972; *Mahanarayanopanishad* translated by Swami Vimalananda, © 1979; *Universal Prayers* translated by Swami Yatiswarananda, © 1977; *Worship of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Shuddhasatwananda, © 1954; *Bhakti Ratnavali* translated by Swami Tapasyananda, © 1979; *The Vedanta Kesari,* © 1992; *The Devi Mahatmyam* translated by Swami Jagadisvarananda, © 1955; *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, Book 2: Her Conversations* translated by Swami Nikhilananda, © 1980; *Adventures in Religious Life* by Swami Yatiswarananda, © 1969, used by permission of the publisher, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India.

From *Vedic Prayers* by Swami Sambuddhananda © 1945 by Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay, used by permission of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay, India

From *Meditation and Spiritual Life* by Swami Yatiswarananda, © 1983, 1945, used by permission of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore, used by permission of Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, India.

From *The Wisdom of God (Srimad Bhagavatam)* translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, © 1943 by Vedanta Press; *Glimpses of a Great Soul* by Swami Asheshananda, © 1982 by Vedanta Press; *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* translated by Swami Prabhavananda, © 1969 by New American Library, used by permission of Vedanta Press, Hollywood, California.

From *A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* translated by Swami Chetananda, © 1988 by the Vedanta Society of St. Louis; *Methods of Knowledge* by Swami Satprakashananda, © 1965 by George Allen & Unwin, London, used by permission of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri.

From *Bhaktiyoga* by Aswini Kumar Dutta, © 1971 used by permission of the publisher, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, India.

From *The Laws of Manu* translated by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, © 1991 by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, used by permission of Penguin Books, Ltd., London.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Credits

Grateful acknowledgment is given for permission to use material from the following sources:

From *Gayatri* by I. K. Taimini, © 1983 used by permission of the publisher, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois.

From *The Science of Pranayama* by Swami Sivananda, © used by permission of the publisher, The Divine Life Society, Uttaranchal, India.

From *Vivekachudamani* translated by Swami Madhavananda, ©1970; *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna,* © 1990; *Uddhava Gita: The Last Message of Sri Krishna* translated by Swami Madhavananda, ©1971; *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda,* ©1971; *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* volumes 1–8, © 1970–1972; *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* translated by Swami Madhavananda, © 1997; *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, © 1974; *Minor Upanishads* translated by Swami Madhavananda, © 1968; *Aparokshanubhuti* translated by Swami Vimuktananda, © 1938; *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka* translated by Swami Mokshadananda, © 1996; *Spiritual Talks* by The First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, © 1968; *In Search of God and Other Poems* by Swami Vivekananda, © 1968; *Vairagya-Satakam* translated by Swami Madhavananda, © 1976; *Talks with Swami Vivekananda,* © 1939; *Religion and Its Practice* by The First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, © 1992; *The Mandukyopanishad with Gaudapada's Kàrika and Shankara's Commentary* translated by Swami Nikhilananda, © 2000, used by permission of the publisher, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati and Calcutta, India.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

From *The Eternal Companion* by Swami Prabhavananda, © 1971; *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* translated by Swami Jagadananda, © 1970; *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother,* © 1983; *Narada Bhakti Sutras* translated by Swami Tyagishananda, © 1972; *Mahanarayanopanishad* translated by Swami Vimalananda, © 1979; *Universal Prayers* translated by Swami Yatiswarananda, © 1977; *Worship of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Shuddhasatwananda, © 1954; *Bhakti Ratnavali* translated by Swami Tapasyananda, © 1979; *The Vedanta Kesari,* © 1992; *The Devi Mahatmyam* translated by Swami Jagadisvarananda, © 1955; *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, Book 2: Her Conversations* translated by Swami Nikhilananda, © 1980; *Adventures in Religious Life* by Swami Yatiswarananda, © 1969, used by permission of the publisher, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India.

From *Vedic Prayers* by Swami Sambuddhananda © 1945 by Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay, used by permission of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay, India

From *Meditation and Spiritual Life* by Swami Yatiswarananda, © 1983, 1945, used by permission of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore, used by permission of Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, India.

From *The Wisdom of God (Srimad Bhagavatam)* translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, © 1943 by Vedanta Press; *Glimpses of a Great Soul* by Swami Asheshananda, © 1982 by Vedanta Press; *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* translated by Swami Prabhavananda, © 1969 by New American Library, used by permission of Vedanta Press, Hollywood, California.

From *A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* translated by Swami Chetananda, © 1988 by the Vedanta Society of St. Louis; *Methods of Knowledge* by Swami Satprakashananda, © 1965 by George Allen & Unwin, London, used by permission of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri.

From *Bhaktiyoga* by Aswini Kumar Dutta, © 1971 used by permission of the publisher, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, India.

From *The Laws of Manu* translated by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, © 1991 by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, used by permission of Penguin Books, Ltd., London.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Index

Absolute Reality. *See* Brahman; Ultimate Reality
absorption. *See samadhi*
adharma, 81, 453
Aham Brahmasmi, 46, 152–157, 243, 453
ahimsa. *See* nonviolence
ajna, 174, 301–302, 453. *See also* eyebrows, center between
anahata, 174–181, 184, 301, 453. *See also* heart center
anahata-dhvani, 109, 246
apana, 135, 136, 271, 274, 282
apprehension, of Reality: right, 46–47, 112, 123; non- and wrong, 99–100
asamprajnata samadhi, *37*, 38, 39, 60, 453
asana, 36, 196–200, 314, 453. *See also* posture
Atman: as Aum. *See* Om (Aum).; Brahman and, 41, 51, 97, 101, 152–160, 161, 166, 390, 410; communion with, 5–6; defined, 5, 390–391, 402, 453; dwelling place, 178; meditating on, 48, 63, 66, 175–176, 388–389; quarters of, 97–98, 101, 104; realizing, 314, 315, 317, 389, 390, 401–402, 410, 432; sheaths and, 52, 189, 235; *Turiya* and. *See Turiya*.
Aum. *See* Om (Aum)
avatara, 81, 453. *See also* divine Incarnation, meditation on
Ayam Atma Brahma, 157–160, 243

benefits of meditation, 27–30, 355. *See also* character transformation; milestones; mystical experiences
bhakti yoga, 34, 454
bliss, 25, 394–400, 426–427. *See also nirvikalpa samadhi*
bodhi, 14
bodies. *See koshas*; sheaths
body strength, 213–217
borrowed experiences, 343
brahmacharya, 352, 364–382; aspects of, 365–366; balancing practice of, 378–379; compromising, 366, 378; defined, 29, 454; as highest austerity, 364–366, 377; importance of, 265, 284, 365, 366–368, 402; overcoming lust, 368, 377, 379–382; practicality of, 377–378; *pranayama* and, 289; spiritual motivation, 366–377
Brahman: Absolute, 15, 92, 104; Atman and, 41, 51, 97, 101, 152–160, 161, 166, 390, 410; conditioned, 78, 81; defined, 41–42, 454; forms of, 42, 54, 275; as goal, 19–26; in heart center, 41, 51, 113, 152, 157–158, 375, 378, 388–389; knowledge of, 16; *mahavakyas* and. *See mahavakyas*.; nondualistic meditation and, 49–52; Om and, 96, 97, 101, 104, 106–110, 112–113, 114–117, 123, 124, 126, 273; as Pure Consciousness, 48, 50, 59, 91; as Self, 45–46, 376; Self-Knowledge and, 19, 42, 55, 135, 137, 154, 432; silence of, 315; as sound, 107, 109, 122, 246, 247; *Turiya* and, 154; as Ultimate Reality, 41–42
breath: *japa* and, 248; mind and, 271; suspending, 284–285, 287, 313–314, 317–318; *See also prana*; *pranayama*
breath control. *See pranayama*

centers of consciousness. *See chakras* (centers)
chakras (centers), 69, 70, 173–186; defined, 454; *japa* and, 251; *kundalini* and, 182–183, 184–185; lotuses, centers described as, 300–302;

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

meditation on, 183–186; mental planes and, 15–16, 184–185, 299–305; names, 174; Vedantic meditation on, 174; *See also specific chakras; sushumna*
character transformation, 347–400; continence vow. *See brahmacharya*; continence.; dispassion, 383–391; enlightenment tests of, 351–352; *guna* expression and, 357–360; health improvement, 352–354; inner bliss, 394–400; one-pointedness and. *See* one-pointedness.; personality integration, 354–360; renunciation, 383–391; self-control, 360–364
chitta, 33, 37, 38, 39, 98, 122, 155, 189, 275, 316, 454
chosen ideal, 12. *See also Ishtadevata* or Ishtam
concentration, 193–195; caution, 71; defined, 4; devotion and, 69; discipline and, 35; egocentric, 34; methods of, 70–71, 193–194; objects of, 69, 70, 75, 76; obstacles to, 423–425; practice of, 24; prerequisites for, 194–195; sacred texts on, 61, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68; *samadhi* and, 45; spiritual, 12–13; stages of, 309–311; units of, 4, 307; value of, 3–4; in Vedanta, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 53, 55, 59; weak, 44, 47; as Yoga "limb", 36; *See also specific methods*; *specific objects*
concentration, methods of, 69, 70–71; maintaining, 70–71; *See also specific methods*
consciousness: defined, 150; is Brahman, 149–152, 243; states of, 16–17, 20, 97–105, 234; *See also* dream state; sleep; *Turiya*
conscious withdrawal, 233
contemplation, 5. *See also* mystic worship
continence: as essential, 34–35, 43–44, 68; *japa* and, 265; obstacles and, 427; Om, meditation on, and, 105, 113, 246; *pranayama* and, 289; *See also brahmacharya*
Cosmic Person/Body. *See* Virata Purusha
crown, of head. *See sahasrara*

darshana, xiv
death, xi; overcoming fear of, 8; of realized person, xv
deity, presiding, 128
delusion, 421
detachment: stages of, 307–308; in Vedanta, 53; *See also* dispassion; *videha*
dharana, 454. *See* concentration
dharma, 81, 155, 454
dhyana: defined, 4, 36, 454; one-pointedness and, 36, 309; Shankaracharya on, 317; steps to, 124; as Yoga "limb", 36
diet, 194; affecting mind, 215; eating habits and, 223–225; *gunas* and, 214–215; moderation in, 225–227, 274; nonviolence and, 218, 221–223; *pranayama* and, 288–289; purity of, 215–217, 218, 222, 418; vegetarian, 218–221, 226–227
direct perception: tests of, xiv; of Ultimate Reality, xiv–xv
direct realization, 22–26
discipline: one-pointedness and, 323; fourfold, in Vedanta, 43–44, 45, 46; spiritual, 124; *See also niyama* (discipline)
discrimination: bliss and, 397; as requisite, 388; Vedanta and, 43, 52–53
disease, 416–417
dispassion, 43; bliss and, 397; counterpart of, 368; depths of, 318–321; invoking thoughts of, 235–236; knowledge from, 163; as requisite, 165, 167, 206, 344, 345, 370; spiritual passion and, 365, 368–369; steadfastness in, 383–391; *See also* detachment
divine form, meditation on, 78–80. *See also Ishtadevata*
divine Incarnation, meditation on, 81–86, 123–124
Divine Lord, meditation on the, 87–90
Divine Mother, of mantras, 137–141, 145
divine play. *See lila*
doubt, 420–421
dream state, 98; hallucinations and, 330–331; as meditation object, 75–76; merging and, 53; Om and, 97, 98, 99–100, 101–103, 111; Reality and, 99–100
dualistic meditation, 55–56, 187, 313

eating habits. *See* diet
ego: origin, 8, 9; suffering and, xii
emotions: freedom from, xiii–xiv, 28; limitations of, xiii; spiritual, 323–325, 342–343
enlightenment. *See* character transformation; milestones
environment, for meditation: place, 204–205, 254, 255–256; solitude, 205–207, 254; vibrations, 207–212; *See also* geographical direction
exercise, moderation in, 225–227
externally-stimulated experiences, 343–345

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

Index

Absolute Reality. *See* Brahman; Ultimate Reality
absorption. *See samadhi*
adharma, 81, 453
Aham Brahmasmi, 46, 152–157, 243, 453
ahimsa. *See* nonviolence
ajna, 174, 301–302, 453. *See also* eyebrows, center between
anahata, 174–181, 184, 301, 453. *See also* heart center
anahata-dhvani, 109, 246
apana, 135, 136, 271, 274, 282
apprehension, of Reality: right, 46–47, 112, 123; non- and wrong, 99–100
asamprajnata samadhi, *37*, 38, 39, 60, 453
asana, 36, 196–200, 314, 453. *See also* posture
Atman: as Aum. *See* Om (Aum).; Brahman and, 41, 51, 97, 101, 152–160, 161, 166, 390, 410; communion with, 5–6; defined, 5, 390–391, 402, 453; dwelling place, 178; meditating on, 48, 63, 66, 175–176, 388–389; quarters of, 97–98, 101, 104; realizing, 314, 315, 317, 389, 390, 401–402, 410, 432; sheaths and, 52, 189, 235; *Turiya* and. *See Turiya*.
Aum. *See* Om (Aum)
avatara, 81, 453. *See also* divine Incarnation, meditation on
Ayam Atma Brahma, 157–160, 243

benefits of meditation, 27–30, 355. *See also* character transformation; milestones; mystical experiences
bhakti yoga, 34, 454
bliss, 25, 394–400, 426–427. *See also nirvikalpa samadhi*
bodhi, 14
bodies. *See koshas*; sheaths
body strength, 213–217
borrowed experiences, 343
brahmacharya, 352, 364–382; aspects of, 365–366; balancing practice of, 378–379; compromising, 366, 378; defined, 29, 454; as highest austerity, 364–366, 377; importance of, 265, 284, 365, 366–368, 402; overcoming lust, 368, 377, 379–382; practicality of, 377–378; *pranayama* and, 289; spiritual motivation, 366–377
Brahman: Absolute, 15, 92, 104; Atman and, 41, 51, 97, 101, 152–160, 161, 166, 390, 410; conditioned, 78, 81; defined, 41–42, 454; forms of, 42, 54, 275; as goal, 19–26; in heart center, 41, 51, 113, 152, 157–158, 375, 378, 388–389; knowledge of, 16; *mahavakyas* and. *See mahavakyas*.; nondualistic meditation and, 49–52; Om and, 96, 97, 101, 104, 106–110, 112–113, 114–117, 123, 124, 126, 273; as Pure Consciousness, 48, 50, 59, 91; as Self, 45–46, 376; Self-Knowledge and, 19, 42, 55, 135, 137, 154, 432; silence of, 315; as sound, 107, 109, 122, 246, 247; *Turiya* and, 154; as Ultimate Reality, 41–42
breath: *japa* and, 248; mind and, 271; suspending, 284–285, 287, 313–314, 317–318; *See also prana*; *pranayama*
breath control. *See pranayama*

centers of consciousness. *See chakras* (centers)
chakras (centers), 69, 70, 173–186; defined, 454; *japa* and, 251; *kundalini* and, 182–183, 184–185; lotuses, centers described as, 300–302;

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

meditation on, 183–186; mental planes and, 15–16, 184–185, 299–305; names, 174; Vedantic meditation on, 174; *See also specific chakras; sushumna*
character transformation, 347–400; continence vow. *See brahmacharya*; continence.; dispassion, 383–391; enlightenment tests of, 351–352; *guna* expression and, 357–360; health improvement, 352–354; inner bliss, 394–400; one-pointedness and. *See* one-pointedness.; personality integration, 354–360; renunciation, 383–391; self-control, 360–364
chitta, 33, 37, 38, 39, 98, 122, 155, 189, 275, 316, 454
chosen ideal, 12. *See also Ishtadevata* or Ishtam
concentration, 193–195; caution, 71; defined, 4; devotion and, 69; discipline and, 35; egocentric, 34; methods of, 70–71, 193–194; objects of, 69, 70, 75, 76; obstacles to, 423–425; practice of, 24; prerequisites for, 194–195; sacred texts on, 61, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68; *samadhi* and, 45; spiritual, 12–13; stages of, 309–311; units of, 4, 307; value of, 3–4; in Vedanta, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 53, 55, 59; weak, 44, 47; as Yoga "limb", 36; *See also specific methods*; *specific objects*
concentration, methods of, 69, 70–71; maintaining, 70–71; *See also specific methods*
consciousness: defined, 150; is Brahman, 149–152, 243; states of, 16–17, 20, 97–105, 234; *See also* dream state; sleep; *Turiya*
conscious withdrawal, 233
contemplation, 5. *See also* mystic worship
continence: as essential, 34–35, 43–44, 68; *japa* and, 265; obstacles and, 427; Om, meditation on, and, 105, 113, 246; *pranayama* and, 289; *See also brahmacharya*
Cosmic Person/Body. *See* Virata Purusha
crown, of head. *See sahasrara*

darshana, xiv
death, xi; overcoming fear of, 8; of realized person, xv
deity, presiding, 128
delusion, 421
detachment: stages of, 307–308; in Vedanta, 53; *See also* dispassion; *videha*
dharana, 454. *See* concentration
dharma, 81, 155, 454
dhyana: defined, 4, 36, 454; one-pointedness and, 36, 309; Shankaracharya on, 317; steps to, 124; as Yoga "limb", 36
diet, 194; affecting mind, 215; eating habits and, 223–225; *gunas* and, 214–215; moderation in, 225–227, 274; nonviolence and, 218, 221–223; *pranayama* and, 288–289; purity of, 215–217, 218, 222, 418; vegetarian, 218–221, 226–227
direct perception: tests of, xiv; of Ultimate Reality, xiv–xv
direct realization, 22–26
discipline: one-pointedness and, 323; fourfold, in Vedanta, 43–44, 45, 46; spiritual, 124; *See also niyama* (discipline)
discrimination: bliss and, 397; as requisite, 388; Vedanta and, 43, 52–53
disease, 416–417
dispassion, 43; bliss and, 397; counterpart of, 368; depths of, 318–321; invoking thoughts of, 235–236; knowledge from, 163; as requisite, 165, 167, 206, 344, 345, 370; spiritual passion and, 365, 368–369; steadfastness in, 383–391; *See also* detachment
divine form, meditation on, 78–80. *See also Ishtadevata*
divine Incarnation, meditation on, 81–86, 123–124
Divine Lord, meditation on the, 87–90
Divine Mother, of mantras, 137–141, 145
divine play. *See lila*
doubt, 420–421
dream state, 98; hallucinations and, 330–331; as meditation object, 75–76; merging and, 53; Om and, 97, 98, 99–100, 101–103, 111; Reality and, 99–100
dualistic meditation, 55–56, 187, 313

eating habits. *See* diet
ego: origin, 8, 9; suffering and, xii
emotions: freedom from, xiii–xiv, 28; limitations of, xiii; spiritual, 323–325, 342–343
enlightenment. *See* character transformation; milestones
environment, for meditation: place, 204–205, 254, 255–256; solitude, 205–207, 254; vibrations, 207–212; *See also* geographical direction
exercise, moderation in, 225–227
externally-stimulated experiences, 343–345

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

eyebrows, center between, 174, 181–182, 183, 198, 251, 263–264, 277, 301–302. *See also ajna*

faith, xiii–xiv; harmonizing reason and, xiv; limitations of, xiii; unquestioning, xiii–xiv
flaming fire, indwelling self thought of as, 231–232
food. *See* diet
free souls, xiv, 22

Gayatri mantra, 14, 127–148, 454; as Divine Mother, 137–141, 145; essence of, 118–119; in heart center, 132, 145–146; meaning, 128–129; meditation stages, 145–148; Om and, 118–119, 128, 130, 132–133, 134, 142, 143, 144; parts of, 134–136, 142–145; planes of existence and, 128, 134, 135, 142–143; *pranayama* and, 142; as prayer, 130–131; presiding deity of, 129–131, 141, 146–148; use of, 127–128; *See also gayatri* meter
gayatri meter, 118, 131–134, 146, 454
geographical direction, 205, 212, 264, 281, 373, 420
goal of meditation, xv, 14, 19–26; direct realization is the, 22–26; life goals and, 19–20; sacrifice and, 20; Self-Knowledge, 19–22
God, experiencing. *See* Self-Realization
God, Personal. *See* Personal God
great Vedic sayings. *See mahavakyas*
gunas, 147, 154, 157, 209–212, 214–215, 260, 358–360, 454. *See also rajas*; *sattva*; *tamas*

hallucinations, 330–331
health: body strength and, 213–217; diet and. *See* diet.; disease and, 416–417; improvement of, 352–354
heart center: Brahman (Atman) in, 41, 54, 113, 152, 157–158, 375, 378, 388–389; description of, 301; as fourth plane, 15; Gayatri in, 132, 145–146; *japa* and, 251, 255, 259, 263; *kundalini* and, 301, 303, 304; meditation, 54, 63, 70, 75, 173, 174–181, 184, 186, 196; mystic worship. *See* mystic worship.; one-pointedness and, 309; *pranayama* and, 271, 285; purity of, 24, 89, 388–389, 406, 407, 411; as seat of intelligence, 158–160
Hiranyagarbha, 93, 150, 169, 235, 454
Holy trinity, 111

ida. *See* sushumna
ignorance: attachment and, 320; destroying, 9, 15, 16, 50, 99, 120, 129, 130, 160, 169, 268, 430, 432; distorting reality, 102–103, 123, 161, 164, 228–229, 311; suffering from, xi, 32, 42, 55, 76, 161; *See also maya*
immortality, 20–22
individuality, 42
inertia, 209, 214, 223–224, 262, 359–360, 379, 417–420, 425. *See also tamas*
inner light, 296–297
integration, personal, 354–360
intuition, 24
Ishtadevata, 12, 78–80, 123, 124, 128, 237, 238, 285, 421, 422, 424. *See also* chosen ideal.
Ishvara, 92, 93, 102, 104, 394, 455
Isvara. *See* Ishvara

japa, 241–269, 455; advantages of, 242, 243; breath and, 248; essence of, 117–118; guidelines in, 253–264; karma and, 265–266; mantras in, 244–246; meaning of, 241–242; methods, 250–252; Om and, 117–118, 241, 242, 246, 247, 262, 266; philosophy of, 246–248; practice of, 253; *pranayama* and, 67–68; psychology of, 248–250; religious words and, 242–243; sacred texts on, 266–269; success in, 264–266; in Tantra, 243, 244–246; in Vedanta, 243–244; violations in, 266; in Yoga, 243
jnana, 140, 188–189, 276, 361, 455
jnana yoga, 34, 455

kaivalya, 19
Kali, 42, 78, 87, 455
karma, 455; *japa* and, 265–266; law of, 42, 265–266
karma yoga, 34, 455
kashaya, 426
knowledge, full, 4
koshas, 16, 31, 297–298, 455. *See also* sheaths
kumbhaka, 283, 284–285, 313–314, 317–318
kundalini: awakening of, 10, 182–183, 184–185, 265, 277–278, 287, 289; cautions about, 289, 305; *chakras* (centers) and, 182–183, 184–185; defined, 10, 455; dwelling place, 304; rising, as milestone, 294, 299–305, 404

laya, 425
lila, 12, 456
lokas. *See* planes of existence
lust. *See brahmacharya*; continence

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

mahavakyas, 149–169; *Aham Brahmasmi*, 46, 152–157, 243; *Ayam Atma Brahman*, 157–160, 243; defined, 149, 456; direct/indirect approaches, 166–169; as *mahavakyas*, 149; meditating on, 163–165, 166–169; *Prajnanam Brahma*, 149–152, 243; *Tat Tvam Asi*, 160–163, 243
Maheshvara, 92, 93, 456
manas. *See* mind
manipura, 174, 184, 301, 304, 456
mantras: defined, 96, 456; of Divine Mother, 137–141, 145; essence of, 117–120; Gayatri. *See* Gayatri mantra.; *japa*, 244–246; presiding deities, 128; seed, 96–97, 110–111, 241, 246; use of, 127–128, 170
master dwelling within, 233–234
Matras, 140
maya, 17, 42, 50, 81, 100, 132, 154, 163, 164, 386, 387, 456
meditation: arguments against, 10–11; cautions about, 69–70, 71; common factors in, 69–71; contemplation vs., 5; defined, 3–11, 12–13, 16; depths of, 4; etymology, 8; goal, xv; highest worship, 5, 13–14; mental control, 6–8; prayer and, 5, 15, 44, 48; process of, xiv–xvi, 16–18; reason for, 6; reasoning vs., 4; seekers, levels in, 123–126, 244, 306–307; self-detachment, 7; self-revealing nature of, 24–25; silence as, 8; single thought to cultivate, 7; types of, 12; *See also specific meditation types*
meditative state, 12–18; concentration. *See* concentration.; consciousness states, 16–17; descriptions of, 13; experiencing, 13–14; *See also Turiya*
mental impressions. *See samskaras*
mental planes. *See* planes of existence
merging, 13, 53
methods. *See* concentration; *specific methods*
milestones, 293–327; character transformation. *See* character transformation.; detachment, 307–308; dispassion, 318–321; fifteen steps and, 314–318; inner light, 296–297; *kundalini* rising, 294, 299–305, 404; mystical experiences. *See* mystical experiences.; one-pointedness, 14, 309; overview, 293–295; performance, speed in, 305–307; posture, 306, 310, 314, 316, 366; *pranayama*, 313–314; psychic powers. *See* psychic powers.; realization stages, 322–323; spiritual emotions, 323–325, 342–343
mind: awakening, 9–10; benefits for, 27–28; breathing and, 271; controlling, 34, 193, 194, 279, 360–364; diet and, 215; inertia in, 209, 214, 223–224, 262, 359–360, 379, 417–420, 425; levels of. *See* planes of existence.; mastering, 6–8; *prana* and, 273; purification, 121–123; types of, 306; withdrawal of, 7, 36, 43, 44, 199, 280, 285, 314, 317, 363, 364, 431, 432. *See* withdrawal.; *See also* concentration; *specific concentration methods*
moderation, in diet, 225–227
muladhara, 174, 184, 284, 300, 302, 303, 304, 367, 456
mystical experiences, 295–299, 328–346; borrowed, 343; externally-stimulated, 343–345; hallucinations/dreams and, 330–331; inner light, 296–297; overview, 328–329; psychic powers, 325–327, 331–342; self-deception and, 330; self-delusion and, 329; sense perceptions and, 295–296; stumbling into, 346; temporary, 343; *Turiya* and, 297
mystic syllable. *See* mantras
mystic worship, 237–240, 243

Nada. *See* Om
Nada-Brahman, 107, 109, 122, 246, 247, 456
nadi, 178, 281, 301, 456
navel chakra. *See manipura*
negation (*neti, neti*), 51–52, 176, 186, 189, 228, 229–236, 456
neti, neti. *See* negation (*neti, neti*)
nididhyasana, 46, 112, 456
Nirguna Brahman, 41, 47, 49, 56, 112–113, 114, 167, 260, 456
nirvana, 19
nirvikalpa samadhi, 45–46, 54, 55, 59, 60, 302, 307, 321, 348, 349, 397–398, 456
niyama (discipline), 35, 197, 314, 315, 364–365, 423, 427, 429, 456
nondualistic meditation, 49–53, 187–189, 313, 350
nonviolence, 34–35, 218, 221–223

objects, of meditation, 69–70; caution about changing in Vedanta, 77; in Yoga, 75–76; *See also specific objects*
obstacles, overcoming, 415–432; obstacle origins and, 427–432; Vedanta system, 425–427; Yoga system, 32–33, 415–425
ojas: defined, 29, 456; spiritual illumination and, 29–30
Om (Aum), 95–126; Brahman and, 96, 97, 101, 104, 106–110, 112–113, 114–117,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

eyebrows, center between, 174, 181–182, 183, 198, 251, 263–264, 277, 301–302. *See also ajna*

faith, xiii–xiv; harmonizing reason and, xiv; limitations of, xiii; unquestioning, xiii–xiv
flaming fire, indwelling self thought of as, 231–232
food. *See* diet
free souls, xiv, 22

Gayatri mantra, 14, 127–148, 454; as Divine Mother, 137–141, 145; essence of, 118–119; in heart center, 132, 145–146; meaning, 128–129; meditation stages, 145–148; Om and, 118–119, 128, 130, 132–133, 134, 142, 143, 144; parts of, 134–136, 142–145; planes of existence and, 128, 134, 135, 142–143; *pranayama* and, 142; as prayer, 130–131; presiding deity of, 129–131, 141, 146–148; use of, 127–128; *See also gayatri* meter
gayatri meter, 118, 131–134, 146, 454
geographical direction, 205, 212, 264, 281, 373, 420
goal of meditation, xv, 14, 19–26; direct realization is the, 22–26; life goals and, 19–20; sacrifice and, 20; Self-Knowledge, 19–22
God, experiencing. *See* Self-Realization
God, Personal. *See* Personal God
great Vedic sayings. *See mahavakyas*
gunas, 147, 154, 157, 209–212, 214–215, 260, 358–360, 454. *See also rajas*; *sattva*; *tamas*

hallucinations, 330–331
health: body strength and, 213–217; diet and. *See* diet.; disease and, 416–417; improvement of, 352–354
heart center: Brahman (Atman) in, 41, 54, 113, 152, 157–158, 375, 378, 388–389; description of, 301; as fourth plane, 15; Gayatri in, 132, 145–146; *japa* and, 251, 255, 259, 263; *kundalini* and, 301, 303, 304; meditation, 54, 63, 70, 75, 173, 174–181, 184, 186, 196; mystic worship. *See* mystic worship.; one-pointedness and, 309; *pranayama* and, 271, 285; purity of, 24, 89, 388–389, 406, 407, 411; as seat of intelligence, 158–160
Hiranyagarbha, 93, 150, 169, 235, 454
Holy trinity, 111

ida. *See* sushumna
ignorance: attachment and, 320; destroying, 9, 15, 16, 50, 99, 120, 129, 130, 160, 169, 268, 430, 432; distorting reality, 102–103, 123, 161, 164, 228–229, 311; suffering from, xi, 32, 42, 55, 76, 161; *See also maya*
immortality, 20–22
individuality, 42
inertia, 209, 214, 223–224, 262, 359–360, 379, 417–420, 425. *See also tamas*
inner light, 296–297
integration, personal, 354–360
intuition, 24
Ishtadevata, 12, 78–80, 123, 124, 128, 237, 238, 285, 421, 422, 424. *See also* chosen ideal.
Ishvara, 92, 93, 102, 104, 394, 455
Isvara. *See* Ishvara

japa, 241–269, 455; advantages of, 242, 243; breath and, 248; essence of, 117–118; guidelines in, 253–264; karma and, 265–266; mantras in, 244–246; meaning of, 241–242; methods, 250–252; Om and, 117–118, 241, 242, 246, 247, 262, 266; philosophy of, 246–248; practice of, 253; *pranayama* and, 67–68; psychology of, 248–250; religious words and, 242–243; sacred texts on, 266–269; success in, 264–266; in Tantra, 243, 244–246; in Vedanta, 243–244; violations in, 266; in Yoga, 243
jnana, 140, 188–189, 276, 361, 455
jnana yoga, 34, 455

kaivalya, 19
Kali, 42, 78, 87, 455
karma, 455; *japa* and, 265–266; law of, 42, 265–266
karma yoga, 34, 455
kashaya, 426
knowledge, full, 4
koshas, 16, 31, 297–298, 455. *See also* sheaths
kumbhaka, 283, 284–285, 313–314, 317–318
kundalini: awakening of, 10, 182–183, 184–185, 265, 277–278, 287, 289; cautions about, 289, 305; *chakras* (centers) and, 182–183, 184–185; defined, 10, 455; dwelling place, 304; rising, as milestone, 294, 299–305, 404

laya, 425
lila, 12, 456
lokas. *See* planes of existence
lust. *See brahmacharya*; continence

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

mahavakyas, 149–169; *Aham Brahmasmi*, 46, 152–157, 243; *Ayam Atma Brahman*, 157–160, 243; defined, 149, 456; direct/indirect approaches, 166–169; as *mahavakyas*, 149; meditating on, 163–165, 166–169; *Prajnanam Brahma*, 149–152, 243; *Tat Tvam Asi*, 160–163, 243
Maheshvara, 92, 93, 456
manas. *See* mind
manipura, 174, 184, 301, 304, 456
mantras: defined, 96, 456; of Divine Mother, 137–141, 145; essence of, 117–120; Gayatri. *See* Gayatri mantra.; *japa*, 244–246; presiding deities, 128; seed, 96–97, 110–111, 241, 246; use of, 127–128, 170
master dwelling within, 233–234
Matras, 140
maya, 17, 42, 50, 81, 100, 132, 154, 163, 164, 386, 387, 456
meditation: arguments against, 10–11; cautions about, 69–70, 71; common factors in, 69–71; contemplation vs., 5; defined, 3–11, 12–13, 16; depths of, 4; etymology, 8; goal, xv; highest worship, 5, 13–14; mental control, 6–8; prayer and, 5, 15, 44, 48; process of, xiv–xvi, 16–18; reason for, 6; reasoning vs., 4; seekers, levels in, 123–126, 244, 306–307; self-detachment, 7; self-revealing nature of, 24–25; silence as, 8; single thought to cultivate, 7; types of, 12; *See also specific meditation types*
meditative state, 12–18; concentration. *See* concentration.; consciousness states, 16–17; descriptions of, 13; experiencing, 13–14; *See also Turiya*
mental impressions. *See samskaras*
mental planes. *See* planes of existence
merging, 13, 53
methods. *See* concentration; *specific methods*
milestones, 293–327; character transformation. *See* character transformation.; detachment, 307–308; dispassion, 318–321; fifteen steps and, 314–318; inner light, 296–297; *kundalini* rising, 294, 299–305, 404; mystical experiences. *See* mystical experiences.; one-pointedness, 14, 309; overview, 293–295; performance, speed in, 305–307; posture, 306, 310, 314, 316, 366; *pranayama*, 313–314; psychic powers. *See* psychic powers.; realization stages, 322–323; spiritual emotions, 323–325, 342–343
mind: awakening, 9–10; benefits for, 27–28; breathing and, 271; controlling, 34, 193, 194, 279, 360–364; diet and, 215; inertia in, 209, 214, 223–224, 262, 359–360, 379, 417–420, 425; levels of. *See* planes of existence.; mastering, 6–8; *prana* and, 273; purification, 121–123; types of, 306; withdrawal of, 7, 36, 43, 44, 199, 280, 285, 314, 317, 363, 364, 431, 432. *See* withdrawal.; *See also* concentration; *specific concentration methods*
moderation, in diet, 225–227
muladhara, 174, 184, 284, 300, 302, 303, 304, 367, 456
mystical experiences, 295–299, 328–346; borrowed, 343; externally-stimulated, 343–345; hallucinations/dreams and, 330–331; inner light, 296–297; overview, 328–329; psychic powers, 325–327, 331–342; self-deception and, 330; self-delusion and, 329; sense perceptions and, 295–296; stumbling into, 346; temporary, 343; *Turiya* and, 297
mystic syllable. *See* mantras
mystic worship, 237–240, 243

Nada. *See* Om
Nada-Brahman, 107, 109, 122, 246, 247, 456
nadi, 178, 281, 301, 456
navel chakra. *See manipura*
negation (*neti, neti*), 51–52, 176, 186, 189, 228, 229–236, 456
neti, neti. *See* negation (*neti, neti*)
nididhyasana, 46, 112, 456
Nirguna Brahman, 41, 47, 49, 56, 112–113, 114, 167, 260, 456
nirvana, 19
nirvikalpa samadhi, 45–46, 54, 55, 59, 60, 302, 307, 321, 348, 349, 397–398, 456
niyama (discipline), 35, 197, 314, 315, 364–365, 423, 427, 429, 456
nondualistic meditation, 49–53, 187–189, 313, 350
nonviolence, 34–35, 218, 221–223

objects, of meditation, 69–70; caution about changing in Vedanta, 77; in Yoga, 75–76; *See also specific objects*
obstacles, overcoming, 415–432; obstacle origins and, 427–432; Vedanta system, 425–427; Yoga system, 32–33, 415–425
ojas: defined, 29, 456; spiritual illumination and, 29–30
Om (Aum), 95–126; Brahman and, 96, 97, 101, 104, 106–110, 112–113, 114–117,

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

123, 124, 126, 273; Cosmic Being and, 95–96; deep sleep and, 97, 98, 99, 101–103, 111; defined, 95, 456; dream state and, 97, 98, 99–100, 101–103, 111; as fulfiller of desires, 111; Gayatri mantra and, 118–119, 128, 130, 132–133, 134, 142, 143, 144; holy trinity and, 111; *japa* and, 117–118, 241, 242, 246, 247, 262, 266; as mantra essence, 117–120; purifying mind, 121–123; sacred texts on, 113–117; as seed mantra, 96–97, 110–111, 241, 246; states of consciousness and, 97–105; *Turiya* and, 99–101, 102, 103, 105; as universal symbol, 95–96, 97, 105–106; Upanishads on, 97–99, 101–102, 113–116, 118–119; worship beginning with, 120–121; *See also* Prajna
one-pointedness, 14, 36, 263, 309, 323, 370–371, 391–394

passivity, 11, 17–18, 71
Patanjali, 13
performance, speed in, 305–307
personal experience, 27
Personal God, 42, 56, 78, 79–80, 85, 106, 111, 167, 169, 228, 244, 322
physical benefits, 27, 28–29, 30
physical condition, 194, 213–217. *See also* diet; health
place, for meditation. *See* environment, for meditation; planes of existence
planes. *See* mental planes
planes of existence, 154, 300; *chakras* and, 15–16, 184–185, 299–305; Gayatri mantra and, 128, 134, 135, 142–143; *lokas*, 134, 154, 300, 302; lower, 15, 200, 345; mental, 15–16, 196, 259, 303, 310; spiritual, 7, 15, 143, 174, 201, 343, 345, 399; in Tantra/Vedanta, 300; worldly, 128, 134, 135, 241; *See also vyahritis*
posture, 33, 36, 40, 68, 194, 196–200, 430, 431, 432; *japa* and, 242, 253, 254–255, 261; as milestone, 306, 310, 314, 316, 366, 411; perfection, 273; *pranayama* and, 273, 278, 279, 281, 290
powers. *See* psychic powers
Prajna, 14, 98, 99–100, 102, 457
Prajnanam Brahma, 149–152, 243
Prakriti: defined, 31, 457; Purusha and, 31–32
prana, 189, 317–318, 428; Atman and, 154; controlling, 412; as cosmic energy, 36, 208; defined, 457; digestion and, 274; Gayatri and, 136; heart and, 178; mind and, 273; as oblation, 232; as vital breath, 135; *See also pranayama*
Pranava, 457. *See also* Om
pranayama, 270–290; awakening of *kundalini*, 287; benefits of, 411–412, 417, 424, 429, 430, 432; cautions about, 282–283, 289–290; *chakras* and, 183; components, 119, 283, 285; concentration and, 194, 197; controlling mind by, 279; defined, 270–273, 280–283, 457; diet and, 288–289; efficacy of, 290; Gayatri in, 142, 144; important points of, 287–289; improper, 305; *japa* and, 67–68; milestones of, 313–314; modifications of, 271–272; philosophy of, 276–278; posture and, 273, 278, 279, 281, 290; practice of, 283, 284–289, 314, 316–317; psychology of, 278–280; sacred texts on, 273–276; Shankaracharya on, 316–317; significance of, 270–273; suspending breath, 284–285, 287, 313–314; types of, 67–68, 119, 285–287; in Vedanta, 274, 276–278; in Yoga, 36, 273–278
pratyahara, 36, 197, 275, 282, 285, 317, 411, 429, 457
prayer, 5; Gayatri mantra as, 14, 130–131; goal of, 113; meditation and, 5, 15, 44, 48; as word symbols, 106
Primordial Man. *See* Virata Purusha
progress indicators. *See* character transformation; milestones; mystical experiences; sacred texts
psychic powers, 325–327, 331–342
Pure Consciousness, xv, 13, 31–32, 41
Purusha: characteristics, 31–32; defined, 31, 457; as meditation goal, 76; *See also* Self

rajas, 38, 209, 214, 215, 260, 357–360, 457
raja yoga, 31, 457. *See also* Yoga
Ramakrishna, Sri, worship of, 238–239
Ramanuja, 13, 215, 216, 217, 457
rasaswada, 426–427
rationalization: freedom from, xiii–xiv; limitations of, xiii
Reality, Absolute vs. relative, xii–xiii. *See also* Ultimate Reality
realization. *See* self-realization
reason: harmonizing faith and, xiv; intuition as, 24; mature form, 24; meditation vs., 4; as Truth criterion, xiii
relative reality, xiii
renunciation, 383–391, 397. *See also brahmacharya*; continence; dispassion
restraint. *See yama*
root chakra. *See muladhara*
routines, 70–71, 201–202, 256

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

sacred texts: on *japa*, 266–269; on meditation, 61–68; meditation on, 170; on Om, 113–117; on *pranayama*, 273–276; on progress in meditation, 401–412
sacred words, 242–243. *See also mahavakyas*; mantras
sacrifice, 20
Saguna Brahman, 41–42, 47, 48–49, 55, 56, 93, 112–113, 114, 177, 458
sahasrara, 54, 174, 178, 181, 182–183, 184, 185, 186, 188, 251, 264, 277–278, 287, 300, 302, 303, 458
Sakti, 139, 185, 321, 458. *See also* Shakti
samadhi: absorption, depths of, 311–313; chakras and, 184–185; characteristics, 14, 37–39, 351; defined, xv, 4, 13, 458; depths, 14–15; divine Incarnations returning from, 83; experience as verification, 348–349; as goal, xv, 13–14, 333; mental planes and, 17; *nididhyasana* vs., 46; Om and, 64, 113, 241; one-pointedness and, 309; *pranayama* and, 273–274, 275, 278, 282; progress toward, 409; Shankaracharya on, 165, 282, 317, 319, 409; stages of, 37–39, 45–46, 54, 307, 311–313, 348, 349; suspending breath in, 284–285, 287, 313–314, 317–318; tests of, 348–349; types of, 348; as Yoga "limb", 34; Yoga *samadhi* vs. Vedanta *samadhi*, 59–60
samprajnata samadhi, 37, 458
samskaras, 32–33, 458
sandhya, 14
sannyasin, 207, 225, 362–363, 371, 378, 387, 458
Sarasvati, 129, 130, 141, 145, 146, 458
Satchidananda, 82, 108, 137, 185, 188, 458
sattva: characteristics, 214, 215, 226, 357–360; defined, 458; diet and, 214, 215, 216, 226, 288, 358, 416; *japa* rosary and, 260; overcoming obstacles, 428; rising, indications of, 357–360; vibrations and, 209, 210
savikalpa samadhi, 45, 54, 55, 302, 313, 348, 398, 458
Savitri, 129–130, 136, 140–141, 146, 458
seekers, levels of, 123–126, 244, 306–307
Self: as Absolute Reality, xiii; contacting, xiv–xv, 9; denying, 9; ego and. *See* ego.; mental control and, 7; quest, 10; sameness of, xiv–xv; *See also* Purusha
self-analysis, 228–236; affirmation in, 229–230; ignorance and, 228–229; methods of, 231–236; negation in. *See* negation (*neti, neti*).
self-control, 7, 28, 43, 228, 360–364, 371–372, 397
self-deception, 330
self-delusion, 329
self-detachment, 7
Self-Knowledge, xiv–xv; Brahman and, 19, 42, 55, 135, 137, 154, 432; direct/indirect paths to, 46–49, 228, 368–369; dispassion and, 320; diversity, knowledge of vs., 154; fourfold discipline and, 43; *jnana* and, 361; liberation and, 22, 60, 333, 388; mental control and, 7; Om and, 113, 115; prerequisites for, 43–44; psychic power vs., 331, 333; results of, 11, 166, 228, 351, 399–400; roadblocks to, 44, 228, 427; self-control and, 7, 28, 43, 228, 361, 363, 371–372; self-inquiry and, 126; service and, 391; skeptical views about, 10–11; as spiritual immortality, 20; steps to, 46, 58, 368, 377, 427; as ultimate goal, xv, 19–22, 42, 166, 357, 369, 370, 374, 376, 391, 394; Ultimate Reality and, 35, 100; wholeness of, 154, 368–369
Self-Realization: character transformation, 347, 354; devotion and, 394; direct realization and, 22–26; ending suffering and, 32; *kundalini* and, 278; as life goal, 4; meditation and, 14, 77, 293; Om and, 246; *pranayama* and, 279, 280; stages of, 322–323; steps to, 34–37; Yoga and, 60
senses: mastering, 225, 360–364; as obstacle, 421–422, 426; withdrawal from, 193–195, 319, 320, 397, 409, 429
service, 391
sexual energy, 284. *See also brahmacharya*; continence; *ojas*
Shaiva, 302, 458
Shakti, 19, 55, 138, 139, 183, 263, 302. *See also* Sakti
sheaths, 52, 189, 231, 235. *See also koshas*
Shiva, 243; as Absolute, 263; defined, 459; as destroyer, 92; Divine Mother and, 137; as Divine Power, 140; forms of, 12, 42, 55, 78, 123, 124; Om and, 111; as Oversoul, 19; Paramatman and, 181; seat of, 183, 302; as substance, 138; symbolic aspects of, 340; Tantra perspective, 139
siddhis. *See* psychic powers
silence, 8
Siva. *See* Shiva
skeptical views, 10–11
sleep: as meditation object, 75; Om and, 97, 98, 99, 101–103, 111; *Turiya* and, 16–17
sloth, 421. *See also* inertia; *tamas*

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

solitude, 205–207, 254
Sphota, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 247, 459
spiritual altitude. *See* mental planes
spiritual emotions, 323–325, 342–343
spiritual experiences. *See* milestones; mystical experiences; psychic powers
spiritual eye. *See ajna*
spiritual illumination, 27–28, 29–30
suffering: causes, xi–xii, 9, 32, 354–355; common responses, xi; overcoming, xiii–xiv, 9–11, 32
sushumna, 177, 180, 182, 184, 185, 277, 278, 299, 302, 304, 305, 424, 430, 459
svadhisthana, 174, 184, 301, 303, 304, 459
symbols: universal, Om as, 95–96, 97, 105–106; Vedanta and, 46, 47–48, 54–55, 56–58

Taijasa, 98, 99, 100, 101, 103, 459. *See also* dream state
tamas, 38, 39, 209, 214–215, 224, 260, 357–360, 417, 418, 459. *See also* inertia, sloth
Tantra: *japa* in, 244–246; planes of existence in, 300
Tat Tvam Asi (That Thou Art), 160–163, 243
temporary experiences, 343
third eye. *See ajna*
throat chakra. *See visuddha*
time, for meditation, 201–203, 256
transcendence. *See Turiya*
truthfulness, 34–35, 364, 371, 393
Turiya: Brahman as, 154; defined, 17, 99–100, 102, 459; Gayatri and, 136; mystical experiences and, 297; nonduality of, 99–101, 102, 103, 105; Om and, 99–101, 102, 103, 105; states of consciousness and, 17, 53, 99–100, 102–103, 234, 321

Ultimate Reality: apprehension of, 46–47, 112, 123; contacting, xiii–xiv; defined, xii–xiii; direct perception, xiv, 41; Yoga concept of vs. Vedanta concept of, 59–60
universal Truth, xiv

Vaishvanara, 97, 101, 460
Vedanta, 41–60; *chakras*, meditation on, 174; creation, process of, 248; defined, 41, 460; direct/indirect approaches of, 46, 49, 169, 169, 313; distinctive marks of, 59; dualistic meditation in, 55–56, 187, 313; enlightenment tests in, 351–352; foundational vs. structural meditation in, 45; fourfold discipline of, 43–44; ignorance and, 42–43, 50; inner bliss in, 397, 399, 426–427; *japa* in, 243–244; nondualistic meditation in, 49–53, 187–189, 313, 350; objective meditation in, 54, 313; objects of meditation in, 77; obstacles in, 425–427; planes of existence in, 300; practices, foundational and structural, 45; *pranayama* in, 274, 276–278; *samadhi* and. *See samadhi*.; seekers, levels of, 123–126, 244; Self-Knowledge and. *See* Self-Knowledge.; steps in, 45, 46–47; subjective meditation, 54–55, 313; symbols/images, 46, 47–48, 54–55, 56–58; Ultimate Reality, 41, 47, 59–60; worship, levels of, 47–49, 123–126, 244; Yoga vs., 59–60; *See also specific objects of meditation*
vegetarianism, 218–221, 226–227. *See also* diet
vibrations, 207–212
videha, 15, 38, 312, 460
vikshepa, 425–426
Virata Purusha: defined, 460; meditation on, 91–94
Vishnu, 42, 78, 87, 92, 111, 460
Vishva. *See* Vaishvanara
visuddha, 174, 184, 301, 460
vyahritis, 110, 134, 142–143, 144, 177, 460. *See also* planes of existence
vyana, 135, 136, 178, 271

Waking state. *See* Vaishvanara
watchful waiting, 232–233
withdrawal: attitude and, 206; conscious, 233; of mind, 7, 36, 43, 44, 199, 280, 285, 314, 317, 363, 364, 431, 432; and response, 356; of Self, 59; from senses, 43, 44, 163, 193–195, 319, 320, 397, 409, 429; *See also pratyahara*
worship: components of, 14; highest form of, 5, 13–14; Om at beginning of, 120–121

yama, 34–35, 197, 314, 315, 364–365, 423, 427, 429, 431–432, 460
Yoga, 31–40; concentration, units of, 4, 307; defined, 31, 33, 460; distinctive marks of, 39–40; *japa* in, 243; limbs (steps) of, 34–36; meditation stages, 36–39; mind types, 306; objects of meditation, 75–76; obstacles in, 32–33, 415–425; *pranayama* in, 36, 273–278; seekers, levels of, 306–307; twofold reality, 31, 59–60; Vedanta vs., 59–60; *See also* Prakriti; Purusha; *specific objects of meditation*

S. P. S. Central Library
Acc. No.
Date of Purchase
Cost
Lal Mandi, Srinagar.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai

S. P. S Central Library
Acc 55644
Date
Cost 185/-
Lal Mandi, Srinagar.

Digitization by Arya Samaj Charitable Foundation, Chennai